That was a small lesson I learned on the journey. What is interesting and important happens mostly in secret, in places where there is no power. Nothing much of lasting value ever happens at the head table, held together by a familiar rhetoric. Those who already have power continue to glide along the familiar rut they have made for themselves.

-- Michael Ondaatje
The Cat's Table

University of Alberta

From Ignorance as Deficit to Ignorance as a Way of Knowing:
To Journey Humbly, Curiously, Creatively and Compassionately

by

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Master of Education

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to Davis

for all the things we do not know
and figuring out as many as we can together

to Bronna, Allen & Shaura

for teaching me not to know everything
and picking me up when I fall down

all my love

ABSTRACT

Traditional public schooling tends to privilege knowledge and knowing, and work with it in ways that are compartmentalized, dual and hierarchical. Within this paradigm ignorance is most often defined as a deficit; a hole to be filled with more knowledge. Employing the work of contemporary scholars, thinkers and educators in fields as widely divergent as ecological sustainability, curriculum scholarship and biological sciences, as well as writings by Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh and 17th century philosopher René Descartes, this work complicates contemporary views of Cartesianism and reconfigures ignorance as a positive and generative way of knowing. Engaged in a way informed by Hermeneutics, Narrative Inquiry and Buddhist philosophical and spiritual principles, the hope is to open space for an epistemology of ignorance characterized by humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion that is sensitive to ideas of a deep and conscious complicity, interconnection and interbeing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FINDING SOME PLACE TO START

What follows is an exploration of the generative, hopeful possibilities inherent to the embrace of *ignorance* as a positive force relative to knowledge, to formal education and a broader pedagogy of Life. I have been playing with – and living – this idea, at various levels of consciousness and in many ways, from my early years of home-schooling in Montréal, Québec, Canada through to these most recent three years of a master's degree in Education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This idea about ignorance as a positive force has been simmering, if you will, and I lay it out in this thesis as a kind of *touching down*, out of the confines of my mind and body into a space where it finds companionship with other thinkers, authors, with teachers and songwriters, where it forces me to confront myself, my defining stories, where it may yet find still more companionship, conversation and growth alongside the minds and bodies of others.

I have discovered that the idea of ignorance as a positive force, particularly within the field and practice of education, is not entirely common and not always easy to discuss in the ways that this work seeks to discuss it. As part of my journey relative to these challenges, I have uncovered several assumptions which appear to underscore my own thinking and which it is, in part, the hope of this work to open up and complicate: I assume contemporary Western culture lives in a way that privileges knowledge and knowing, that compartmentalizes knowledge and sets it up in subject/object, oppositional and hierarchical dualisms

where mind prevails over body, thought over feeling, humans are seen as separate

from – and able to control – nature and where individual needs are frequently

prioritized over societal ones (Aoki, 2005, p. 251; Eppert, 2008, p. 62; Gablik,

1991, pp. 98, 114; Smith,1999, p. 46; Vitek & Jackson, 2008, p. 3). I assume that

the ways in which we privilege knowledge, marked very much by our cultural

desire to *find and have answers* or *supporting data*, has lead us to culturally prefer

and find security and comfort in *certainty* rather than in *uncertainty* (still more

hierarchical duality). And, I assume that while there is a tendency on the part of

the proponents of a generative ignorance, myself included at times, to point

fingers at the early Enlightenment work of René Descartes, particularly his

Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in

the Field of Science (*Discourse on Method*), for its role in our current state of

knowledge dominance, so there is also benefit in a rigorous engagement with this

work to confront the ways in which it has, itself, been compartmentalized and

taken from its context.

Certainty, as I appear to define it relative to these assumptions, lives

alongside having answers and answers are generated by an accumulation of

knowledge. Conversely, uncertainty is generated by 'not knowing' (ignorance)

and requires the asking of questions and subsequent gaining of knowledge which

– in an uncertain world and vast universe – inevitably raises more questions.

Uncertainty, in this way and by its nature, inevitably contains *moments* of

certainty. Alternatively, certainty, especially when closely held and privileged,

tends to limit its exposure to uncertainty so as to remain secure; it is, in other

words and more poetically, a deep challenge to avoid being "paralyzed by the limits or 'incompleteness' of [one's] 'selves,' or [one's] commitments, or [one's] inability to 'see the whole or sing the whole'" (Maxine Greene in Miller, 1998, p. 148).

Shoshana Felman (1987) writes that "human knowledge is, by definition, that which is untotalizable, that which rules out any possibility of totalizing what it knows or of eradicating its own ignorance" (p. 78) and furthers the idea that ignorance can be a positive force in education and a broader pedagogy of Life. For, if we can accept the truth of our perpetual "ignorance" (p. 78) and "incompleteness" without becoming "paralyzed" (Miller, 1998, p. 148), the fears associated with uncertainty can break open to be shaped by humility, nurture space for curiosity, generate creativity and inspire compassion. In this acceptance and embrace of ignorance as potentially generative, it is possible also to recognize that we are never alone in our ignorance and that mutual support and multi-dimensional understanding which come from community are the quickest routes to a next transient moment of certainty, the next "blurred, tentative, and multiple way of knowing" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 217).

A strong, and well-supported certainty may allow for a durable sense of comfort and security but the more powerful the desire to hold fast to certainty, the more there is to fear and the harder it is to embrace humility, curiosity, creativity or compassion. Claudia Eppert (2008), writing of Buddhist perspectives on, and responses to, fear in Western Society, speaks to the idea of hierarchical dualisms and to this type of fear when she writes that "we develop investments in emotions

and concepts, favoring, for instance, life over death, sameness over difference, good over bad, pleasure over pain, beauty over ugliness, significance over insignificance, and love over hate" (p. 62). She goes on to say that

> our ego self is bent on consolidating our sovereign identity and on
> achieving lasting pleasure (the perceived positive side of the dualisms), it
> is inconsolably insecure about possible threats to its survival and the
> fulfillment of its desires. The chase for security, for "me" and "mine," in
> the belief that obtaining these will lead to permanent happiness and will
> bring relief from restless desire, inevitably breeds a paradoxical insecurity
> that inspires dynamics of fear. Fearing what we might lose or not be able
> to acquire, we spend a great deal of our time worrying, strategizing,
> fantasizing, forever contemplating the future, bound to restless mind
> energy about what has (not) occurred, what is (not) occurring, and what
> might (not) occur. (p. 62)

So dependent am I, in fact, on my Western cultural environment and just this sort of fear-based "strategizing, fantasizing… [and] restless mind energy" (p. 62) that it feels ridiculous, even as I suggest it above, that anyone *could* find security and comfort – pleasurable and generative forms of humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion – in *uncertainty*. It sounds absurd. Being uncertain, unsure, unknowing, ignorant is always so uncomfortable in my experience – and for all the reasons Eppert suggests – so how could it ever be conceived of as a positive thing? It seems important to point out that I also appear to assume, somehow, that being comfortable is *better* than being uncomfortable which is evidence of still

more hierarchical duality. Ultimately, however, this mindset and set of cultural habits – with which I myself wrestle by way of accountability to the unquestioned patterns of my own thinking and as invitation to others to do the same – is not the only way to live. In a nascent exploration of Buddhism, I have found that people engaged in Buddhist thought and/or practice appear to find strength and purpose in just this sort of deliberate discomfort and self-facing, people who are far from "paralyzed" (Miller, 1998, p. 148) by unknowing and uncertainty:

> Right View is the view that transcends all views. It is free from discrimination, free from dualistic thinking. As long as you're caught in one view, you can't have Right View. It is possible for us to consider all kinds of views and not to be caught in any of them. When we speak of Right view we don't mean a view that's superior to all other kinds of views. Right View is the absence of all views. We know that all views should be removed. "All views" includes the teachings in this book. All teachings should be considered to be instruments and not absolute truth, even the [Buddhist] teachings on impermanence, no-self, and interbeing. (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71)

This type of thought shows that even a central belief/value at the heart of a philosophical perspective, a "foundation of all ethical action" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71) within a spiritual teaching – as "Right View" is to Buddhism in this case – can itself be built on a foundation of continuous seeking and uncertainty shaped by moments and "instruments" of fleeting certainty.

Thus, I return to my first assumption and posit the idea that due to our Western habits of privileging knowledge and certainty, we have built the vast majority of our formal systems of education (institutions such as schools and universities) in such a way that, despite there always being exceptions to the norm, the norm of what is most valued is in no way rooted in a philosophy such a the Buddhist philosophy of "Right View." Formalized education systems, themselves deeply hierarchical, are structured not only to privilege knowledge and the comforts of certainty but to demand *proof* of knowledge in the form, for example, of successful grades on essays and tests and successful formatively assessed completion of curriculum benchmarks or candidacy exams so that a 'next level' can be attained. In some places, such as the United States in support of policies such as *No Child Left Behind*, "practices are designed to set in place strict outcomes, powerful surveillance and monitoring mechanisms, and punitive measures if outcomes are not met" (Clandinin, et al., 2006, pp. 169-170). Within these formal systems of education, and "high-stakes" (p. 169) testing environments, answers and/or carefully supported ideas and/or well-demonstrated skills are the currency of progress, not an ability to consciously, steadfastly accept the "untotalizable" (Felman, 1987, p. 78) and "incomplete" (Miller, 1998, p. 148) nature of knowledge one "instrument" at a time (Nhat Hanh T. , 2012, p. 71) and then face it – and each other – humbly, curiously, creatively and compassionately.

Moreover, the goal is not just to have answers, supported ideas or demonstrable skills, but *successful* answers, *well-supported* ideas and demonstrable skills which have previously been designated as being *valuable* by

curriculum and test makers, Faculties of Graduate Studies and Research, Defense Committees etc.. This observation is offered not to suggest that curriculum and test makers, faculties or committees are 'the enemy,' as that would create yet another dualism and breaking apart of a community that most assuredly is built from, and must answer to, itself. The possible merit of this line of thought is to consider further that while an individual's interests and questions often do play an important part in the process of acquiring knowledge and in successfully meeting benchmarks within these formal systems of education, it is really a heady and complicated concoction of everyone involved – policy-makers, pundits, researchers, teachers, students and parents – who decides, through an equally complicated process of historically and culturally defined negotiation, complicity and hierarchical power structure, what students should learn and exactly how they will prove they have learned it in order to attain this 'next level;' this permission to *go on* and learn or do something at another level.

> the Old Master would say: such and such a thing must be learned, and then this other thing and after that, this other. Selection, progression, incompletion: These are his principles. We learn rules and elements, then apply them to some chosen reading passages, and then do some exercises based on the acquired rudiments, another book, other exercises, another professor. At each stage the abyss of ignorance is dug again; the professor fills it in before digging another. Fragments add up, detached pieces of an explicator's knowledge that put the student on a trail, following a master

with whom he will never catch up. The book is never whole, the lesson is

never finished. (Rancière, 1991, p. 21)

While a way-of-being that privileges uncertainty and ignorance *instead of*

certainty and knowledge might argue that no book *is* ever whole nor any lesson

ever *finished*, what I suggest Rancière speaks to above is that educational

journeys in a traditional system are, first, designed and governed not by the

students' capacity or interests but by others and second, and more relevantly that

these governing interests first define a perpetual cycle of *never knowing it all* and

then define that uncertainty and ignorance as a persistent and negative state of

deficit. Dwayne Huebner (2008) frames it another way and introduces the

violence inherent to knowledge dominance when he writes:

> The school is the one social institution constructed with children and
>
> youth in mind, yet they are often alienated in and from that institution.
>
> Others dwell in it and make it their own. Schools are a major institution of
>
> the principalities and powers, and a major source for teaching the myth of
>
> redemptive violence – that the world can be corrected and redeemed
>
> through power (including the power of knowledge) and might, but not
>
> through love (p. 22)

> As a result of this deficit-based relationship to learning and the "myth of

redemptive violence" (Huebner, 2008, p. 22) within Western culture's dominant

education systems, it is perhaps worth considering that the humility, curiosity,

creativity and compassion which are inherent to ignorance, have been greatly

undermined and, in some cases/moments, lost outright. It feels reasonable to

suggest that when we disrespect the importance of ignorance, and its relationship to humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion – when we privilege certainty and an attendant (largely false) sense of continuity generated by a privileging of certainty - we undermine any hope we have to grow and live in healthy relationship to change and/or entropy; we risk stagnation even as we have come to understand that an ability to cope with change will be key to our future success.

In Canada, for example, current British Columbia Minister of Education, George Abbott, writes in his opening message to the BC Education Plan that education is currently "based on a model of learning from an earlier century" and that we must "prepare our children for success not only in today's world, but in a world that few of us can yet imagine" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 2). A sentiment echoed by the "Alberta Education Action Agenda" (2011-2014) in its statement that "an education system's past success does not guarantee its future success – especially in a world that is changing more quickly than anyone could have predicted" (p. 3). This rhetoric speaks to the ideas of education systems that must, by necessity, honour ignorance, humility and uncertainty by virtue of the essential unpredictability of the future. But, even as it opens itself up to the curiosities and potentially generative discomforts of ignorance and uncertainty, it neglects the powerful *burdens* and *responsibilities* placed upon us by not-knowing and not having answers; by an acknowledged surplus of ignorance and deficit of knowledge. For, when we *truly* accept that we are ignorant and that we do not know what will happen next, we must step back

from the language of 'preparation' and move toward the far more unstable and unpredictable language of conscious 'creation'.

To encourage and invite ignorance, in this way, allows us to see that if human action in the world is, in fact, moving more "quickly than anyone could have predicted" (Alberta Education, 2011-2014, p. 3) then it is doing so because *we have made it that way* and not because it is inevitable or, in some way, natural or right. Once we begin to see that human action is governed by human choices we are burdened and empowered at once with the responsibility and creative opportunity to make decisions about the human world. When we add this heavy yet potentially inspiring awareness to the fact that no matter what we choose we are only one integrated and interconnected part of our broader, living world, a world which is governed not by us but by rules we cannot control (such as entropy amongst many others), we find ourselves first elevated and empowered by an increased sense of responsibility and then rendered almost insignificant against the backdrop of a planet that has seen and lived through many species before us and may yet play host to others after we are gone. In this context, it is even more impressive that any of us, for any amount of time, can avoid paralysis (Miller, 1998, p. 148) and no wonder that we privilege and hold close our certainties and knowledge...

Again, I find myself in judgment of my own ideas and chosen words because some part of my upbringing, schooling and/or experience has made me feel that it is not *good work,* or even appropriate, to speak poetically toward the age of the planet, the vastness of time and space and the possibility of a

permanent human exodus from the biodiversity of our world in an academic

master's thesis in the field of Education. It's too big, my mind tells me. It

undermines the potential gravity of the work and it doesn't matter that many

amazing academic minds, whose writing has inspired me, have done so before

me… What matters, my self-judgment tells me, is that *I* am *not them*. Not – as

the "Old Masters" (Rancière, 1991, p. 21) have obviously inculcated in me – *yet*

and, perhaps not ever.

I have no choice but to risk it, however, if only to prove that it can (and

likely should) be done. I can claim interesting company and say that like René

Descartes (1960) I hope to make my contributions "by confessing my ignorance

more freely than is usually the case among those who have studied a little, and

possibly also by presenting my reasons for doubting many things that others deem

certain" (p. 23). I will move on to say that to introduce our dominant

epistemologies to a hopeful ignorance, and the humility, curiosity, creativity and

compassion sheltered within it, is far more chaotic and unpredictable than is the

privileging of knowledge and knowing. A world which openly acknowledges,

and lives in comfortable relationship to, ignorance is full of possibility,

collaboration and a challenging (to our very cores) creative "abundance" (Jardine,

Friesen, & Clifford, 1997, p. 97) while also a formidable opponent to the extant

hierarchies of the "principalities and powers" (Huebner, 2008, p. 22) and strength

of the "Old Masters" (Rancière, 1991, p. 21).

In full acknowledgment that this language carries with it strong binaries, I

have found value in consideration of what Bill Vitek (2008) describes as a shift

from emphasis on a Knowledge Based Worldview (KBW) to an Ignorance Based Worldview (IBW) (pp. 213-214). I propose that the word 'worldview,' as I take it up *through* Vitek, refers not to a perspective that is closed and fixed, nor does the idea of a shift from an KBW to an IBW mean that one *supplants* the other. A KBW and an IBW are inexorably bound together by the inseparability of knowledge and ignorance themselves and 'worldview' refers, instead, to a 'way-of-seeing' marked by responsiveness, flexibility and an awareness of how views always change. Ultimately, the use of these two terms here, and as this work progresses, is meant only as a potentially useful frame from which to generate more conversation about our relationship to knowing, knowledge and ignorance that demands contention with the fact that an embrace of a healthy and generative relationship with ignorance cannot be done in a tidy "how-to" or "step-by-step" way.

An IBW necessitates a turn away from the orderly teaching of compartmentalized "subjects" and "disciplines" or the direction to teach "across topic areas" to encourage "Engaged Thinkers" who work "with multiple perspectives and disciplines" (Alberta Education, 2011, p. 6) as though we did not first create the relevant divisions only to now try to pull the pieces back together. As I discover again and again, to even be able to speak about these ideas demands self-awareness and a self-granted permission to write about things as though perhaps they were never dual, hierarchical or at all separate to begin with. Engagement with ignorance asks us to consider that "we, as a species, are not defined by human fellowship but by the subtle and essential interdependency with

animals, insects and landscape" (Fidyk, 2011, p. 138) and that we are one with these "Beings Innumerable" (Jardine, 2000, pp. 40-41). Conceived of this way, all subjects and disciplines are naturally interconnected and it is the divisions between them that are unnatural. To sit with this idea as a *transient* or *fleeting* certainty - as one more "instrument" to consider and perhaps surrender (Nhat Hanh T. , 2012, p. 71) – is to consider that any directive or suggestion to study or bring "subjects" and "disciplines" (Alberta Education, 2011, p. 6) back together is nothing more than solution to a problem that need not have ever existed and which has caused, and continues to cause, a great deal of damage to what our language would label the 'ecology' and 'biodiversity' as well as to 'social systems' and to any organizational sense of 'community' (Vitek, 2008, p. 214; Fidyk, 2011, p. 133).

  We are all impoverished by a KBW built on duality and compartmentalization, especially as it exists in our formal mainstream systems of education. A predominantly KBW has permitted our education systems to be built on our fears of suffering and thereby sets the stage for paralysis (Miller, 1998, p. 148) in the face of the "untotalizable" (Felman, 1987, p. 78); the unknown. Further, it defines us as individual, isolated pieces (stakeholders and/or positive or negative outcomes) in the mechanics of well-ordered educational infrastructure that runs, it seems at times, as though it could exist *without* humans or the broader living world. The idea of being separate from one another in a system that also has its own distinct and separate life is, from a Buddhist perspective, perhaps one of the greater causes of suffering as it imposes those

divisions through language use and method only to try to reintegrate them in a way it feels it can control. It teaches us to forget the intrinsic interconnections and intergenerational nature of human life as well as our unavoidable responsibilities to our living world and to each other. It places emphasis on our separation as subject in a world of objects (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 75), blinds us to our mutual responsibility and robs us of the simultaneously narrower and more universal perspective of "interbeing" (pp. 75-76) as well as the "powerful collective energy of mindfulness and concentration" (p. 119) that comes from living generously and openly in community. I would suggest that it is also a serious hindrance to any stated pedagogical, or indeed other societal, goals we may have for ongoing innovation or growth, as it is hard to be truly innovative without occasionally making the attempt to let go of our current "instruments" and "views" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71), without thorough examination of our foundations.

> And I firmly believed that by this means I would succeed in conducting my life much better than if I built only upon the old foundations and gave credence to the principles which I had acquired in my childhood without ever having examined them to see whether they were true or not. (Descartes, 1960, p. 12)

René Descartes (1960) lived at a time where philosophy, in his opinion, had been "studied for many centuries by the most outstanding minds without having produced anything which [was] not in dispute and consequently doubtful and uncertain" (p. 8). His quest, therefore, was built on these historically (to his

time) and, in his opinion, insufficiently certain (p. 8) "foundations" (p. 12). I work, however, in a world *after* Descartes so though he and I appear to share the same essential desire to question our epistemological underpinnings, we work toward different ends: he to understand things piece by piece (p. 15) and make things more certain and less doubtful (p. 8) and I to explore the possibility of a non-dualistic, non-compartmentalized approach to life and learning where the world is viewed as whole, interconnected and as a place where we can find strength, beauty and purpose in uncertainty and doubt; in our "incompleteness" (Miller, 1998, p. 148); in the vast, unavoidable fact of our *ignorance*.

In order to even consider some of the ideas he found on his quest for certainty and truth about the world, Descartes (1960) found himself in contention with oppressions having to do with the current religious and political climate of his times. He writes:

> Three years ago, when I had completed the treatise containing all these matters, and when I was beginning to review it for purposes of publication, I learned that people to whom I defer, and whose authority over my actions is hardly less than that of my own reason over my thoughts, had disapproved of a hypothesis in the field of physics that had been published somewhat earlier by another person. I do not want to say that I had accepted that hypothesis, but at least before their censure I could not imagine that it was prejudicial to religion or to the state, and therefore I could see no ground for not professing it if reason convinced me of its truth. (p. 44)

With his circumspect reference to Galileo as "another person" (p. 44) he calls attention to the dangers of fundamentally questioning the epistemological grounds on which we stand. I, personally, do not fear imprisonment or expulsion from my country as I suggest there might be benefits in a way-of-seeing that acknowledges and embraces ignorance. I do, however, know – and have already alluded to the fact that – it is difficult to encourage this change because of how entrenched knowledge-dominance has become. Any chance we have to move toward a more generous nurturing of ignorance forces us to face our past choices and behaviours, as a culture and as individuals. We must reckon with our participation (unconscious or conscious) in the many serious, and aforementioned, oppressions, fragmentations, dualisms, limitations, stultifications (Rancière, 1991, p. 7) and the manifest and potential violence of knowledge-dominance, all without losing a sense of purpose or confidence in living; all, again, without becoming "paralyzed" (Miller, 1998, p. 148). This facing up to our roles as both perpetrators and victims within this system, along with the attendant necessity to surrender the comforts and power of certainty – sought so intently by Descartes in his time – is perhaps the largest, and least discussed, part of the literature that contends with this type of shift toward ignorance.

It is my hope and intention, with this masters thesis, to explore these ideas and assumptions – these transient certainties about knowledge-dominance and the potential good of nurturing ignorance – with a view to synthesizing and adding my voice to the extant literature on the subject. The hope, as well, is to proceed with an invitational spirit offered to those who choose to journey alongside me

and whose work in this area may come after my own. As evidenced above, I may well undertake this project in ways that could appear dramatic, emotive and, even, at times irrational. Given my nature and the ideas to-hand, this thesis is likely to be more poem then traditional thesis and I will not apologize for this even as I draw attention to these sorts of judgments (by self or others) as a part of the subject matter of the thesis itself. My goal is never to pretend to *know-it-all*, the hypocrisy of which, given the subject matter of a non-totalizing generative, humble 'ignorance,' would be egregious and not a little amusing. That said, I carry tremendous fears with every word I write that as the last page of this document is turned by those who must judge it, I will be found to not *know enough* about ignorance. I am afraid that no matter how convincing I may be about the benefits and difficulties of de-centering knowledge dominance, the formal system of education in which I am writing and working will tell me that my text is insufficiently rigorous and knowledgeable by some standard I cannot possibly anticipate about how much I am supposed to know about ignorance. I am, in short, afraid that I will fail and failure in this school project, at this point in time and as yet another example of how very interconnected and complicated the world really is, is a possibility which carries with it real-life implications to my ability to support myself and my son because for me, these subject matters, ideas, florid poetic musings, passion and personal stories are also my only paying *job*.

Is it possible that I share this detail to engender sympathy in my readers?

Maybe they won't fail me if they know the stakes?!?

It would be easy to think so, wouldn't it? Even I have found it vaguely

distasteful that I have so readily shown my real-world vulnerability in this highly

ritualized university process of 'master's thesis' but I have forced myself to do so,

so that I can draw attention to the idea that the distaste and judgment is far easier

than asking ourselves:

- What is wrong with drawing attention to the broader life implications of
  passing or failing a master's program? A grade level? An individual
  assignment?

- What is wrong with the sharing of experience that might inspire
  compassion?

- Why does it feel, somehow and as my own struggle implies, that
  vulnerability and compassion are weaknesses?

I do not ask these questions so that I can then answer them later in this thesis in

some tidy rhetorical way. I ask them because to ask them is to be *humble* in the

face of my own limitations, fears and struggle; it is to be *curious* as to where and

why those limitations and fears exist in myself and the system that helped to

define me; it allows for *creative* possibility as it connects the institutional

(represented by academic writing and academic standards), with the personal

(represented by my life and circumstances) with the ideas being explored

(ignorance and an attendant holistic view of the world); and, because *compassion*

should never be seen as weakness.

In addition to engagement with the humility, curiosity, creativity and

compassion I see as being the basis for an IBW, my explorations will be informed

and built upon by my still new and growing connections with Hermeneutic and ecopedagogical scholarship; the philosophy and relational ethics of Narrative Inquiry with which I am only just becoming acquainted; various works with ignorance in the fields of Sociology, Education and Science; my nascent understandings of Buddhist thought, philosophy and tradition; issues of sustainability; and my autobiographical experiences, including those as someone who, as mentioned at the outset of this introduction, was home-schooled until she was nine years-old. Along the way, I will offer for consideration different etymological, experiential and chosen definitions of the words "ignorance," "complicity," "education," "educate" and "educator," and will do my best not to throw the proverbial baby (the many benefits of our existing knowledge projects which absolutely include a thesis such as this one) out with bathwater (the hierarchy, duality, compartmentalization, violence and damage perpetrated by knowledge dominance).

In Chapter 1, the idea is to work through René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* alongside the various ways in which ideas from that text have touched my life, altered – in many cases narrowed – my perspective and to begin to see how they might again expand and even work with me in an embrace of 'ignorance' as a positive and hopeful epistemology. Chapter 2 tackles the word and concept of 'ignorance' with a view to complicate the ideas of 'ignorance as deficit,' move – through etymology amongst other things – toward more positive connotations and provide, along with Chapter 1, the foundational ideas for the balance of this text. Chapter 3, for its part, serves to deepen into the ideas from Chapters 1 and 2

alongside other thinkers who take up Descartes and 'Cartesianism' in various ways. Further, it will build on the frame of 'ignorance as deficit' and offer the possibility to also see it as 'double projected certainty.' In Chapter 4 the hope is to begin to imagine, more deliberately, what a tending toward an IBW might look. How would it work? Can it be accomplished systemically? Strategically? It also examines in some detail the word and word history of 'complicity.' Chapter 5, brings all of these ideas home to the world of education even as it works to open up the idea of Life as being fundamentally pedagogical and – as with 'ignorance' and 'complicity' in earlier chapters – seeks to use both current and historical definitions of the words 'education,' 'educate' and 'educator' to aid in this process. The hope in Chapter 5 is to complicate ideas about what education *is* so as to make space for the possibility of changes to philosophical underpinnings as opposed to changes in procedure or policy. In all Chapters, the aim is to help create a space where we, and our children, are not just *capable* of living in an unpredictable world as it unfolds but are instead able, ready and willing to *choose how* we will live humbly, curiously, creatively, compassionately and in healthy, responsible and conscious interconnection within a world that will always be, and has always been, *whole*.

Finally, and in all that I do, I will aim to practice what I preach and continue, as I have done throughout this introduction, to name and confront my own assumptions, fears and limitations – my transient and potentially fleeting certainties – as best I can. I will take time to examine my own points of discomfort and tension, my own prejudices and to the experience of writing about

these ideas in this thesis after so many years of negotiating knowledge-dominance and the potential wonder of embracing ignorance as a positive, holistic way-of-seeing and thinking in a post-Cartesian world. I wish to work, in my way, towards "right view" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71); toward my own letting go and practice of ignorance. In sum, and like Descartes (1960),

> it is not my intention to present a method which everyone ought to follow in order to think well, but only to show how I have made the attempt myself. Those who counsel others must consider themselves superior to those whom they counsel, and if they fall short in the least detail they are much to blame. I only propose this writing as an autobiography, or, if you prefer, as a story in which you may possibly find some examples of conduct which you might see fit to imitate, as well as several others which you would have no reason to follow. I hope that it will prove useful to some without being harmful to any, and that all will take my frankness kindly. (p. 5)

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN READING THIS TEXT

Mainstream, Traditional, Alternative

This text speaks, generally, of 'mainstream public education' or 'traditional schooling' in full consideration of the fact that this will mean different things to different people. To me, just generally and very basically, it suggests the essential elements of a top-down approach to education and schooling whereby a principal is in charge of teachers, teachers are considered in charge of students and the accepted curriculum comes in the form of a 'program of study' (or its like) from government institutions of some kind. It is an environment where summative assessment remains a strong, if not overwhelming force, relative to notions of progress and learning and is often defined, in practice, as much by ideas of bureaucratic order, management and discipline as it is by the idea of educative experience. Beyond the sharing of some of my personal experience as a home-schooled child and as a graduate student who has found a wonderful space in her schooling in the form of a weekly meeting called 'Research Issues,' this text does not take up the alternate practices, or counterstories, to this 'traditional' or 'mainstream' model. Though these alternate practices and strong counterstories, in their substance, would likely represent school experiences entirely commensurate with the call of this work vis a vis an IBW characterized by a holistic embrace of humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion, they are not taken up for two reasons, one perhaps less noble than the other.

The first (less noble) is that it would have required still more research and still more pages written at a time when the social and institutional pressure to *finish* greatly exceeds any desire to widen scope. The second, and one to which I have in fact given quite a bit of thought over these past months, is that the conversation in which I am trying to take part, and perhaps even *begin* in my own ways, seeks to work from and towards a space where alterity is not necessary… In other words, so long as these places of alternate practice and counterstory run consciously *against* the grain of mainstream schooling in their language and practice, they remain, in my mind relative to the undertaking of this thesis, a part of mainstream schooling. This is not to in any way disparage or belittle them or their inherent beauty or value – I myself was raised in just such a deliberately alternative space – but it is a conscious philosophical and theoretical effort, almost impossible though it seems at times, to step away from the binary and attempt to write and think from a place where the world is integral and whole.

Recursion

From a Lacanian, psychoanalytic stance, of which I will own I know little beyond that which I was exposed to first in a four year undergraduate degree in Film and English literature at Simon Fraser University in the 1990s and then – *very* minimally – in the past three years of my master's, Shoshana Felman (1987) writes what follows in a way that I find very moving, very resonant:

> Proceeding not through linear progression but through breakthroughs,
>
> leaps, discontinuities, regressions and deferred action, the analytic

learning process puts in question the traditional pedagogical belief in intellectual perfectibility, the progressist view of learning as a simple one-way road from ignorance to knowledge. (p. 76)

She helps me to articulate my own process which, though informed differently – as indicated in the introduction – from more Hermeneutic, Narrative and Buddhist perspectives, appears to dovetail with what she calls "the analytic learning process" (p. 76). Reading her words allowed me to understand and articulate that if, in reading this work, there is a feeling of recursion, it is important to know that it has been deliberate. I task myself with coming full circle many times in order to hold myself accountable to my own ideas and pay respect to my belief that a more progressive linearity that aims to scaffold its way toward clear exposition is one of the ways in which things can be made to seem simple when they are not. Finally, I take my loops – and wander around in time and thought – in the hope that each time I return something new has been added; that the repeated ideas now have hovering around them *more* ideas, more stories and more wonders. It may not, of course, work out this way in the mind of all readers and may invite more or less of a reader's engagement along the way, but it has been my goal and seemed an intention worth sharing.

Of Pronouns

This work moves rather fluidly through various literary voices including, but not limited to, first person, second person and third person expression. My use of first person pronouns, in particular, was a hard won privilege in my

undergraduate program in the 1990's and remains a place of comfort for the way in which it allows me to put forth ideas without presenting them as though they are objectively formed and somehow inherently reasonable. This said, I also recognize that a heavy reliance on personal pronouns can appear to be ego-driven, and be somewhat alienating in that it renders the discourse shaped by that "I/Me/My/Mine" as something where there is less room for *others* to join in the conversation.

I cannot fully abandon what I feel is the honesty inherent to owning, through personal pronouns, that what comes through my mind and body is of me and in no way a kind of definitive truth, but I have also made an effort to use it consciously and in closer relation to those parts of this thesis which are *more personal* or *more personally felt*. The hope is that this choice, and the other choices made in this work relative to pronouns, will not make anyone feel as though they are being excluded from 'my' journey. I am not trying to hold myself apart or exclude anyone from journeying alongside me and ignorance – quite the opposite in fact – and sincerely hope that in so-saying that which follows will feel as invitational in spirit as I intend.

CHAPTER 1: AN (+ MY) INTRODUCTION TO RENÉ DESCARTES

I begin here, with some autobiography, some stories, about my original exposure to the ideas of René Descartes, the ways in which those ideas have played out in my life and how, having finally exposed myself to *Discourse on Method*, I have complicated and enriched this history as it joins my present. I begin here because his work existed in the world before I existed and my early stories relative to my interpretations of him existed prior to this writing, this story. Additionally, and as stated in the introduction, he seems to be a key figure, and fairly widely recognized foil, relative to the idea of a turn toward ignorance as I espouse it, namely, as a positive, generative and hopeful possibility characterized by deep attention, humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion. Thus, he – and some of the stories introduced here – will be taken up in various ways throughout this thesis and, given this, in terms of a clear temporality and a desire to build this work from a multifaceted, open – and shared –foundation, it feels as though this is the right place to start.

We Meet

I first read about René Descartes (1960) in a Grade Nine Math Class. He made himself known to me through his presence in a tidy information box on a page in my math textbook in the section about Cartesian Geometry. It was, if memory serves, earlier in the school year. My birthday is late in the year and I began school – some might say – a half a year ahead of myself in Grade Five, so I

was probably 13 years-old when I encountered it. I remember a portrait of him in a pale yellow oval, inset against a dark, ruddy square. I remember reading about "objectivity," and "reason" and the saying readily, and rightly, attributed to Descartes: "I think therefore I am" (p. 24). I remember reading little bursts, for the first time, about the scientific method.

I remember thinking that this guy was trouble.

Something about him offended me. I mean, I was a 13 year-old, and fairly feisty and intense by nature, so feeling affronted was not exactly a rare occurrence, but there was something about this text-boxed, cordoned off, compartmentalized 'Descartes' that stood out to me. I could not help but feel as though it were due to him that my fundamentally artistic, deeply emotional nature always felt out-of-step with what school wanted from me; what, indeed, it felt the whole human world expected of me. Again, I realize that this feeling would have been notably heightened by the physiological and psychological realities of adolescence but the key to this memory, as I share it now, is that it is being shared more than 25 years later in work being written at a graduate level in a university. In other words, René Descartes and his associations with the Scientific Method, have stayed with me for two and half decades. Until the writing of this thesis, though, I had not ever engaged with any of his work directly.

He Lingers and Makes Me Think Ill of Scientists

For years, I lived with an unquestioned sense that René Descartes, without humility or context, vaunted reason above all and hand-in-hand with objectivity

and rationality. When I was younger, as already mentioned, this elevation of 'rationality' brought with it a sense that being calm, cerebral, grounded, clinical and unemotional were desirable traits and that their opposites (all of which I arguably possessed) were, by default, very undesirable. As the years passed, I would encounter people who seemed to have, in a rather self-satisfied way, those very desirable qualities (frequently those who studied science, which did much to cement my dislike of Descartes and of scientists) and who looked down at those who did not make efforts at objectivity in everything.

"The world makes sense, Sulya," these encounters seemed to say to me, "you just need to stop and see clearly, without emotion, without bias."

Around this time, I learned the word "ethnomethodology" in a 100 level Sociology class at Simon Fraser University in 1992. At the time – and I do not share this in any way to pretend that it is an accurate description of ethnomethodology for it is a very old memory, never since researched and included here strictly because, right or wrong, my memory of this introduction to this concept changed me – it was explained to me using the example of a car accident. An ethnomethodological approach was, as I understood it, that which made the assumption that for every person who witnesses a car accident there will be a separate and different account of the accident. The idea was that there was no 'truth' to the witness accounts of an accident, just their multiple perspectives put together to make a more complete picture than if only one account were to be considered. This idea gave me traction in the philosophical tug-of-war I felt I was constantly having with René Descartes and those whom I perceived were his

acolytes. If no one person could ever be counted on to see the whole of the truth, then how can there ever be objective truth assessed by human beings? Who were *they* (Descartes and acolytes) to claim that they could be rational and objective?

More than this, I began to take a stance – in my early 20s – that there was no such thing as objective truth. As rejoinder, people would point to gravity as an objective truth. I would reply that gravity is not actually a fixed constant the world over, it changes. In my mind, this variance – however small – means that it could perhaps change altogether one day. If it can be different in little ways, what was to stop it being different in big ways? If it is not, in fact, a true constant, then couldn't it stop existing altogether on some part of the planet for some reason? I even once said, in another conversation altogether, that I would not be surprised if one day the sky broke apart and fell down in great blue shards. We can find out all we want about the world and the universe, about the human body, I thought, but there will always be the possibility that we are wrong and that the rules might change. To assume anything less, in my view, was arrogant and presumptuous. It meant we were searching so hard for answers and truth – ways to protect our positions – that we stopped being genuinely open to possibility (to "incompleteness" (Miller, 1998, p. 148) and "untotalizibility" (Felman, 1987, p. 78)) or as deeply observant of the reality before us. René Descartes (1960), I can now say, might phrase it this way: "It is certain that many institutions have defects since their differences alone guarantee that much, but custom has no doubt inured us to many of them. Custom has perhaps even found ways to avoid or correct more defects than prudence could have done" (p. 12). It is easy, in other

words and in deference to strong conventions within our "institutions" (p. 12) – be

they a broadly defined discipline such as science, a smaller more intimate

institution such as a family, or a massive institution such as a nation state – to

simplify or neglect the small variances in concepts such as gravity in the earlier

example or, to take a more social example, a name thought too 'foreign' in order

to blend into a *new world*. This is how my grandmother went from Sulya to Sara

after-all… It is too easy, and far more comfortable, to *ignore* that which

complicates in order to make our science, our lives, our cultures appear more

simple than they are. It also safely forecloses on the vastness of all that is

'unknown' – the infinite nature of our ignorance – by making a virtue out of

simplification and convention.

Of Science Fiction and Historical Context

      I recollect these arguments, the tears shed in vehemence and fierce defense

of my perceived right to see the world as deeply multi-perspectival, subjective

and emotional, changeable and changing, and feel very protective of the woman I

was then. I might not see her perspectives as being so full anymore – as

sufficiently complicated – but I respect her and see clearly the roots of this

current journey relative to an IBW, in her paradoxical, if at the time unconscious,

assertion of *her truth* even as she denied the existence *of* truth.

      I realize, too, as I write these stories of this time in my life, that much of

what I asserted must have sounded like science fiction to my companions… I

have always, and continue to, read a fair bit of speculative, or science, fiction.

Less interested in what may be called fantasy (typified by *The Lord of the Rings,* for example), my mind bends more toward space and different planets with different qualities, forms of life and I remain eminently partial to the types of minds who might imagine that gravity simply may not exist in one part of space and write about that for a while. I enjoyed, very much – also in my early 20s – the scene in the film *Contact* where actress Jodi Foster's character gives a speech about how everything from airplanes to walking on the moon seemed like science fiction at one time (Zemeckis, 1997).

It is this predilection of mine for science fiction that made it so interesting to read in *Discourse on Method*, that in order to write of his ideas in a way that would hopefully not offend anyone in power (of church or state) at the time, René Descartes (1960) himself created a nascent form of science fiction:

> I therefore resolved to leave this world for them to dispute about, and to speak only of what would happen in a new one, if God should now create, somewhere in imaginary space, enough matter to make one; and if he agitated the various parts of this matter without order, making a chaos as confused as the poets could imagine, but that afterward he did nothing but lend his usual support to nature, allowing it to behave according to the laws he had established. (p. 32)

There were things he saw in the world and things he wanted to think about, but to propose that they be thought of *here*, on this earth, meant he might risk as much as his life because he didn't see the same things as other people in his society; he didn't see the things other people wanted him to see. So, though *Discourse on*

Method is absolutely a key text as regards the historical, philosophical schism of mind from body (Descartes, 1960, pp. 24-25); the idea of man as machine (p. 41); the position that understanding is best achieved through ever-increasing compartmentalization of subject matter as well as through the imposition of order on things which are "not necessarily so" (p. 15); a preference for "utility" in scholarship and research (p. 14); the idea that it is both possible and desirable to "make ourselves masters and possessors of nature" (p. 45); the idea that being "firm" and "determined" are clear virtues regardless of the quality of one's choices/actions (pp. 19-20); and, the clear intent to "achieve greater certainty and to reject the loose earth and sand in favor of rock and clay" (p. 22) – much of which I will take up in later sections relative to an IBW – Descartes was also not so much the villain my 13 year-old self made him out to be. He imagined ways to leave this world, and invent another, just to keep thinking freely (p. 32).

He was a man of his time, as I am a woman of mine. I could make the case that if his ideas were originally expressed to me in a grossly simplified, compartmentalized way via 'text box' in 'textbook,' it's because in 1637 René Descartes (1960) himself told the world that these breakdowns and simplifications were the best way to understand the world (p. 15), but it doesn't necessarily follow that this was his intent. In fact, in his assertion that he wished for his ideas to "do no harm" (p. 5) it is equally reasonable to say that he might well be very disappointed in some of the ways in which his work has been taken up. Who can say?

Ultimately, I was not entirely mistaken about how the man in that text box was 'trouble,' how he seemed to wish to dismiss the complexity of interconnectedness, interbeing and intersubjectivity, the soft uncertain messiness of "loose earth and sand" (Descartes, 1960, p. 22), in favour of a more clinical, practical, divisive reality, ostensibly free from bias where truths and answers are the desired currency; a world where "given a correct sense of personal discipline, or the application of the right method, everything should be at least "masterable"" (Smith, 1999, p. 56). Now, though, having read *Discourse on Method*, I am finally beholden to more than one perspective of René Descartes (1960). I have "[freed] my mind from the false opinions which I had previously acquired" (p. 17) and am on a path whereby he has become yet another "instrument" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71), yet another transient and fleeting certainty, yet another "blurred, tentative, and multiple way of knowing" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 217).

I have, in short, been helped along in my journey relative to an IBW in kinship with a holistic view of the world by one of the key figures in the Western philosophical shift toward compartmentalization and knowledge dominance…

This is *humbling*.

And makes me *curious*.

Which I hope will lead to some genuine *creativity* in all that follows as I proceed with as much *compassion* as possible for my 13 year-old self, my 20 year-old self, my current self, for knowledge, for ignorance and for René Descartes (1960): "I want it to be understood that the little I have learned thus far

is a mere nothing compared to what I do not know and yet do not despair of

learning" (pp. 48-49).

CHAPTER 2: A RE-INTRODUCTION TO THE WORD 'IGNORANCE'

I move now, over to stories, scholarship, definitions and etymologies of ignorance. I do this, as in the chapter about Descartes (1960), to apply some of the possible merits and viewpoints of an IBW to the word and concept of 'ignorance.' As such, what follows in this chapter is not meant to set up, in any way, some new or definitive perspective on ignorance. Again, like Descartes, I aim to put forward my thinking, show some of the connections I have made and am making, and leave it to your own discretion to choose to take up some parts of it if you will (p. 5). The goal, here, is to juxtapose various ideas about ignorance as I have encountered and explored them along with literal and historical definitions of the word so that new meanings might emerge. It is a further hope, that these emergent meanings might generate space and possibility, in the minds of others, about ignorance as it relates to knowing and my current bias toward what I perceive might be the benefits of an IBW. In other words, to begin with a troubling of the idea, and ideas, of René Descartes in Chapter 1 and then work similarly with the conception and word of ignorance in this Chapter 2, is a way of bringing us together – even if not in agreement – so that as this work progresses, and these ideas about Descartes, Cartesian thinking and 'ignorance' recur and unfold, we may share in different perspectives and, together, create space for still more.

Metanarratives, Daily Stories & Research Issues

Twenty years ago, Ted Aoki (1993), finding inspiration in Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* wrote:

By "the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation,"
[Lyotard] means the diminishing legitimacy of the master stories about
"progress" (progress is always good for us); about "goals" (we as humans
are driven by goals); about "rationality" (by sound reasoning we can arrive
at all truths); about "truth" (somewhere there is a thing called "the truth,"
which, by our striving, we can discover); about "unity" (unity is not only
possible but desirable; hence we should strive to connect things and
people into a totality); about "ends-means" (our world is striated
technically; everything boils down to ends-means.) These are grand
narratives whose privileged primacy Lyotard questions. Legitimation by
these and other metanarratives says Lyotard, has led to delegitimation of
understandings we come to through narratives and stories we daily tell and
hear. (pp. 262-263)

Twenty years on, I read it and thought that these master stories have not been, in
any substantive, systemic way, diminished in their legitimacy; that they evoke all
the qualities that originally made me think ill of scientists and which I still
somehow felt I was supposed to have, but didn't, in a post-Descartes world. I also
had to own that I have experienced, and been made aware of, places and spaces of
exception to those metanarratives. And then own still further, that even within

those places more nourishing to the "narratives and stories we daily tell and hear," (Aoki, 1993, p. 263) we all still struggle with these metanarratives (p. 262).

For example, at the time of this writing, I do my best to attend a weekly meeting called 'Research Issues' at the Centre for Research in Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta. 'Research Issues' is essentially a talking circle. We take turns speaking about whatever we wish to speak about and are listened to, supported by, people who are scholars, educators, nurses, gardeners, cyclists, poets, visual artists, occupational therapists, exchange students, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers. This is a place full of the telling and hearing of the very "daily" stories to which Aoki refers (Aoki, 1993, p. 263), a place most assuredly living as a conscious and deliberate alternative to the metanarratives of "progress," "goals," "the truth," "rationality," "unity," and "ends-means" (Aoki, 1993, pp. 262-263) that still, arguably and perhaps now more than ever, define a university environment.

A colleague of mine at this gathering, always introduces himself by name and adds, "and I am studying democracy." It is the habit of the group, from years before I even joined its ranks, to cheer and hoot for him and for democracy. There is no sarcasm in this cheering, no mockery. We cheer because we know that our colleague *means* it. His study of democracy is not one that reduces it to a buzz word in a stump speech. It is forever ongoing, deeply felt research. It is, in my opinion at least, worth cheering for.

At a certain point in the last year, another colleague in this circle tried to encourage everyone to cheer for me and for ignorance as we all have been doing

for democracy. At one time, at least, she outright said, "I think we should cheer for ignorance too." There are many reasons that people might even want to do as she suggested but whenever I do take the time to say, "I am Sulya Fenichel and I am studying ignorance" it seems to me that they - none of them but she - can bring themselves to cheer. It feels as though there is palpable, shifty, discomfort with the whole idea.

Perhaps there is a sense that to cheer for me and for ignorance would diminish the tradition of cheering for our colleague and democracy; a desire not to offend or reduce – and I respect that completely. But, given the way other people, where and whenever my research topic of 'ignorance' arises, have demonstrated discomfort with the word and concept of ignorance, I don't think my colleagues' seeming unwillingness (inability?) to cheer for ignorance at 'Research Issues' is simply emblematic of their desire to keep a special place for a friend and his study of democracy. 'Research Issues' is, as I have already said, a unique, open, imaginative place that pushes through surfaces and isn't afraid to ask difficult questions (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 232). So, it seems that the tension I perceive around the word 'ignorance' as I have been using it thus far and described it at 'Research Issues,' is itself a surface worthy of some deeper attention.

One theory I have played with is the idea that the shear weight and vastness of *not knowing* – the fear of paralysis (Miller, 1998, p. 148), the confrontation with the "untotalizable" nature of human knowledge (Felman, 1987, p. 78) – as I have already intimated repeatedly in this work, is fundamentally

uncomfortable. This, undoubtedly, plays some part in the experience I have had at "Research Issues," but I suspect this experience is far more defined by the fact that I am studying ignorance in a Faculty of Education devoted to the teaching of teachers whose jobs are, will be, and have been for over a hundred years, defined by the desire and mandate to steadily reduce the amount of ignorance in the world. Earlier in my coursework when I asked a high school science teacher, also engaged in her masters work, what was conjured for her when I said the word 'ignorance' she replied that it immediately made her think "don't need no learnin' and don't want none" (Fenichel, 2012). If education is, essentially, about the steady reduction of ignorance and ignorance is defined, as my colleague and Shoshana Felman ((1987) define it, whereby "ignorance, in other words, is not a passive state of absence, a simple lack of information: it is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information" and "teaching… has to deal not so much with a lack of knowledge as with resistance to knowledge" and a "desire to ignore" (p. 79) then it is not difficult to understand either that ignorance is a contentious word for teachers, nor that it is deeply challenging to see it as commensurate with the humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion that I propose. My colleague's associations with the word 'ignorance', replete with incorrect *unlearned* grammar, is a powerful, lived "daily story" (Aoki, 1993, p. 263) of ignorance and were I to make 'arguments' against it, I would just be playing into the metanarratives that Aoki highlights so well above (pp. 262-263) and that I attend 'Research Issues', in part, to move beyond.

So, how did my colleague come by this definition of ignorance?

Of Assessment & Ignorant Bastards

In the field and institutions of mainstream Education, standardized testing and regular, systematic (and systemic) evaluation of everyone from preschoolers to teachers and professors are a key part of day-to-day procedure. Though formative assessment appears to, in certain areas, be growing in its relative value, summative assessment remains integral to how students, teachers and professors alike move 'up' through grades, pay grades, titles and ranks. Within mainstream Education, at all levels, there is a powerful pressure to *prove what you know* and how that knowledge informs your *ability to achieve.* This proof of knowledge - tests passed, adequate grades achieved, positive course evaluations received, candidacy exams passed - in order to be able to advance to another grade or level, get funding, keep a job etc., casts ignorance as definable and finite; carefully packaged. It is ordered and structured in an ascending hierarchy of packages, in fact, where there is always someone who knows a specific set of things that you do not yet know, who will decide - after at time - if you have proven that you know those things well enough to go on to the next level and learn from someone else who also knows more than you (Rancière, 1991, p. 21).

It is rare that anyone in this process stops and asks you what *you* know, about your "daily stories" (Aoki, 1993, p. 262) of living. Though you may well be asked what you *care about*, what excites or inspires you, this is frequently done in order to try to teach you new and better *methods* for expressing that care, excitement and inspiration. At a high school level, to take an example I will

return to in more detail later, your personal interests may become the topic of an essay but the *lesson* (the work, the thing for which you will be graded) is how to write the essay. If it is found that you do not write essays well, this may be labelled – politely – an area where improvement is needed, where 'more work needs to be done.' But, underneath this type of politely framed criticism, the basic truth being expressed is that you *do not know how to write an essay*. This 'ignorance' about writing essays will show as a deficit in your grades, and – possibly – in your ability to achieve a new level and learn something new in the hierarchical system of school. That you cared about – were possibly even profoundly moved, challenged or changed by – the *topic* of your essay may well make little to no difference at all depending on the specific curricula, schools, educators, temperament of, and flexibility afforded in 'marking' to, your specific teacher or essay examiner.

In this fairly common, if rich in interesting variables, story of contemporary public education, ignorance is articulated as something we possess or have within us, something negative as it stops us from achieving success in grades or progress. Ignorance is something, we are taught in school, that can be slowly cured over time by knowledge. We can learn proper techniques for writing good essays and this knowledge will fix, or fill, our ignorance so we can get better grades. So, what of the person, evoked by my colleague, who claims he/she "don't need no learnin' and don't want none?" What of this "active dynamic of negation" this "resistance to knowledge" (Felman, 1987, p. 79)?

With ignorance most commonly defined as something cured by "learnin'" how can this person *not* be seen in a negative light? It appears that it is acceptable to struggle with "learnin'" – to accept your knowledge deficits as a given, displace your own personal knowledge (your experience, daily stories, interests and things that excite you) in deference to the knowledge prescribed as valuable by others, and to try to *do better*. It's another thing entirely to claim you have no deficits.

Personally, I would find it far more interesting and hopeful to sit down with this person who "don't need no learnin' and don't want none" and ask him/her what they *do* know, to hear the stories of his/her life and experience in a way which acknowledges that "knowledge…is not a substance but a structural dynamic" (Felman, 1987, p. 83); a way that honours "the importance of tentative knowing… [that] embraces a multiplicity of perspectives over time and place, preserving a sense that the story could be told otherwise… that the story is for now; it is unfinished" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 223). But, I also understand that in a scenario such as this, the rather defensive and arrogant sort of ignorance at play is more often attributed to *being* itself by its critics and would-be 'fixers:' he/she *is* ignorant. It's not that he/she knows different things, knows differently or even that he/she might know things differently now than he/she knew them before, it is that he/she *is* a living breathing absence of knowledge.

Many people have likely heard, or possibly even used, the expression 'ignorant bastard' at some point. It is an expression reserved for just this type of willful ignorance. Frequently, 'ignorant bastard' is also seen as a state of being

that can be healed over time by knowledge. Within a school system, it is expected that this type of ignorance can be healed through various methods of exposure to ideas and conversation that will first generate awareness (another way of saying 'identify areas of ignorance'), and second, present and even negotiate a volley of information and ideas with which to enrich/inform/fill that newly acknowledged awareness/ignorance. Social Justice projects, in general, and much of the work being done around bullying in Canada, to take one example, are all built on just this type of premise, process and definition of 'ignorance'.

Official Canadian Anti-Bullying Programs Seen Through an IBW

Bullying programs at work in Canadian schools, as defined by the government itself, focus on "assessment of the nature and prevalence of bullying," on the isolation and alteration of "environmental factors in schools that allow bullying to occur" and/or on "increasing the eight protective factors for preventing bullying behaviour" (Public Safety Canada/ Sécurité Publique Canada, 2008, pp. 2-3). They begin, in other words, with generating new knowledge about how, where, when, why and how often bullying occurs, and by working toward strong preventative measures. On the surface, this is as it should be and it would be strange for me to argue against a program that begins with an insistence that we examine the social environment of our schools – frequently through the use of student surveys and lots of dialogue between students and teachers – and then seek to change school environments through an encouragement of strong relationships, intercommunication and mutual responsibility between students,

teachers, parents and other stakeholders along with a co-creation, amongst those same groups, of strong standards of behaviour and codes of conduct (pp. 2-4).

In fact, the logic of: Locate and define the extent of the problem (identify the deficits) and then work together to find solutions (reduce or completely fill the deficits through the generation and implementation of new knowledge) in the context of bullying in Canada, seems to be a winning strategy. Of the five bullying prevention programs highlighted by the government report on bullying (2008), the highest named rate of success in the reduction of bullying is shown as 60% over three years (p. 3). This is impressive and I can only hope translates into a real improvement in the daily experience of kids in schools. Also impressive are the calls for community involvement and mandates for strong student involvement, without which bullying prevention programs are found to "be unlikely to succeed" (p. 4).

Where things become more complicated is when we work not from a desire to rid ourselves of ignorance but to *use* ignorance as a tool to humbly, curiously, creatively and compassionately generate deeper forms of knowledge and understanding. For example, in the same Canadian Government document (2008) the named "Risk Factors Associated with Bullying" illustrate that several of the risk factors for bullying are also risk factors for "general delinquency, such as truancy, aggressive behaviour and a lack of respect for authority figures" (p. 1) and raise questions such as:

- Is a failure to attend school truly and always an antisocial behaviour?
  Even when it might be associated with the necessity to help care for

younger siblings in larger families with fewer resources for other forms of

childcare? Or due to an economic failure whereby a student cannot afford

transit to school for a full five days a week?

- Can aggressive behaviour, depending on other factors regarding a

  students' life experience such as abusive home environments where a

  youth might take on the role of protector for self and younger siblings, be

  its own preventative – even territorial – measure against other, more

  brutal, forms of violence?

- Do all authority figures, simply by virtue of their named and situational

  authority, *deserve* respect? What if one of the reasons for truancy is abuse

  from teachers or school administrators and not peers?

The named definition of bullying in this same document is that is it is

"characterized by acts of intentional harm, repeated over-time, in relationship

where an imbalance of power exists" (Public Safety Canada/ Sécurité Publique

Canada, 2008, p. 1). Could this not be how some children and youth feel about

school itself? After all, school can easily be conceived as a place where they are

forced, by law, convention and convenience to their parents and caregivers – the

vast majority of whom in Canadian contexts work and would otherwise be forced

into even greater expenses for childcare – to be inside for approximately seven

hours a day where they have little to no say over what they are supposed to learn,

how they learn it and where every adult present is an authority figure to whom

they must show a contextually acceptable respect unless they wish to risk the

punitive consequences of defiance. Removed from the context of this paper and

the broader context of education, and except for the fact that there is a general limit of seven hours a day, this could well be a description of prison. More interesting, though, is that the government document closes with the idea that:

> Overall, support from all levels is needed to help children and youth who bully to understand the implications of their behaviour, *the importance of interacting respectfully with others and to find ways of achieving power and status through positive leadership* (emphasis mine). (Public Safety Canada/ Sécurité Publique Canada, 2008, p. 5)

And reveals an underlying, ostensibly Canadian given the context, value whereby "power and status" (p. 5) are both unquestioned and acceptable goals and that it is only the methods by which we achieve them which are important to question and consider. It is not a stretch, then, to see that if the authority figures involved in the implementation of these bullying programs in schools were to encourage children and youth to question the value of power and status in and of themselves, they would be encouraging those same children and youth to question the very nature of teacher and parental authority.

I am aware that through my use of only this one Canadian Government document on the subject of bullying, I myself am likely (definitely) not acknowledging the vast and deeply felt literature on the subject of bullying where the questions I pose above do, in fact, get asked. I have done this consciously, though, and not just for a practical avoidance of over-encumbering this section of my thesis (or because I am feeling overwhelmed by the burden to prove that I've read what I've read, no-less read even more) but because it is important to

recognize that in the official policy of the government, those more expansive, whole-life affirming positions are only superficially felt and expressed. So long as governments (provincial and federal) continue to hold positions and create documents about what occurs in our schools, I would like to expect more from them on such a complicated and important topic as is bullying; more *humility* relative to the shear number and diversity of human stories in the area of bullying, more *curiosity* to uncover those stories and perspectives, more *creativity* in the attention to the roles government and schools play in modelling systems of power and more *compassionate* than the labels of "delinquency" and "truancy" and "antisocial" (Public Safety Canada/ Sécurité Publique Canada, 2008, p. 1) imply. These issues and processes of learning are, through a IBW, where ignorance is composed of humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion, far more complicated and fundamentally challenging to status quo pictures of bullying than an identification of deficits and subsequent encouragement to alleviate them no matter how collectively or successfully accomplished.

Bringing These Pieces Together: Back to Research Issues

All of these relationships to, and perspectives on, ignorance are the loaded, complicated, complicating, fundamentally challenging (as in challenging to our fundaments) context in which a cheer for ignorance by my peers at 'Research Issues' would have to be made. They are also a likely influence on why my amazing colleagues at 'Research Issues' might not be willing or able to cheer for ignorance. Many of them are, or have been, classroom teachers in formal systems

of education. I have not. I have heard one in particular speak of how, on leaving

K-12 classrooms to do research work with children and youth from the vantage of

the university instead, she has to try *not* to approach her research participants

from the position of 'teacher' because this frequently makes her more task-

oriented and outcome driven (Cardinal, 2014). Not knowing, not being 'in

charge' is hard to do after you've enjoyed the privileges of it and/or wrestled its

difficulties and naturally makes a relationship with, and negotiation of, the idea of

ignorance as something potentially beautiful, incredibly difficult.

In truth, I too have had to wrestle with the idea of celebrating ignorance

for its potentials of humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion, if it means also

celebrating the 'ignorant bastards' who threw my high school friend up against a

locker and told her she had to choose between being 'black' or 'white', even

though those two genetic legacies are bound together in her very cells by the

biological joining of her 'white' mother and her 'black' father. Or the teacher

who, in Grade Nine, once sat me on a stage in front of all my peers, bathed in a

spotlight and asked me if I had any friends. My compassion, especially, was

challenged by both of these incidents. Without compassion, humility becomes

difficult and without humility it is almost impossible to be curious or creative…

But, not enough good happens if we get stuck in our judgments and accusations of

deficit.

We must go deeper.

There were reasons those boys threw my friend up against the locker.

There were reasons that teacher did what he did to me. Those reasons, and I will

not dare to presume to guess at what they might be nor *excuse* the exhibited

behaviours they caused, matter to the creation of a bigger picture. They matter to

what Clandinin et al (2006) refer to as "seeing things and people close up and

big" (p. 169) – and knowing them would likely have changed the lasting effects of

both of those incidents on my friend and on myself. To seek and come to know

those reasons, whatever they may have been, is a process inherent to the idea of

leading with compassion, to the effective mediation of healing and prevention of

future suffering and to the Christian notion of 'turning the other cheek.' Without

this compassionate exploration of rich backstory, intention and motivation, we

continually "approach reality, that extraordinary state of creativity, with all the

burden of society, with the conditioning of a given culture, and so we never

discover anything new" (Krishnamurti, 2007, pp. 23-24).

So, how do we move past the fears and discomforts inherent to the

challenges of an IBW to being able to live with discomfort and challenge relative

to the inescapable nature of our always infinite, unavoidable, ever-present,

interpersonal and societal, human-centric ignorance? How do we work towards

an acceptance of the idea that ignorance is not even chiefly a deficit – *bad thing* –

to be fixed? How do we begin to work with the truth that:

> In fact, ignorance, it seems, is something of knowledge's virtual opposite,
>
> or shadow. As if coconstituted, there would be no knowledge at all were
>
> not ignorance present or possible as well, and yet our knowledge projects
>
> seem to issue from this quest to irrevocably eradicate ignorance, which too

I suppose if accomplished would effectively bring our knowledge projects

to an end. (Quinn, 2011, p. 33)

How, in other words, do we recognize that knowledge/knowing are bound

inexorably with ignorance/not knowing and move away from ignorance as an

enemy to be annihilated to ignorance as – far less violently – simply another way-

of-seeing? To the idea that ignorance is perhaps the most generative and hopeful

worldview we might have available to us; one that might just be key to a healing

call to reintroduce the "integrity of the world" (Smith, 1999, p. 46).

Being Less-than, Bestial & Hellish : Definitions & Etymologies of Ignorance

Without meaning to take the biblical comparison lightly at all, potential

softening and changing in relationship to the word and concept of ignorance may

well begin with the word.

The word *ignorance* (and *ignore* and *ignorant*) is etymologically rooted in

the compounding of "*in* – 'not, opposite of'" with Old Latin *gnarus* "aware,

acquainted with" or with "*gno-* 'know'" (ignorance, 2001-2013; Ayto, 1990, p.

293). Putting this together we get these historical definitions of *ignorance*:

not know

not aware

not acquainted with

opposite of aware

opposite of acquainted with

The shift to the word "opposite" makes a subtle but important change in how we perceive the definition. From merely signifying a lack of awareness we find the suggestion, deeply expressed in previous sections by Shoshana Felman (1987) that we are situated in opposition *to* awareness, a sense that we do not *wish* to know more than we do or, worse, that we *refuse* to know more than we already do (p. 79). We come back full circle to: "Don't need no learnin' and don't want none" (Fenichel, 2012)

The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines ignorance as a noun meaning: "the fact or condition of being ignorant; want of knowledge (general or special)" (ignorance, 2010a). It then behooves us to look up the word ignorant. With no less than five categories for defining the adjective "ignorant," several arcane, the definitions that stand out relative to this topic are:

1. a. Destitute of knowledge, either in general or with respect to a particular fact or subject; unknowing, uninformed, unlearned.

2. a. With in: Uninformed or unskilled in, not acquainted with (a subject). rare. b. with of: Having no knowledge of; hence †unconscious of, innocent of, having no share in (also ignorant to). (In quot. 1755, taking no notice of, ignoring.)

5. dial. and colloq. Ill-mannered, uncouth. (ignorant, 2010)

Dictionary.com defines ignorant as: "ig·no·rant [ig-ner-uhnt] adjective 1. lacking in knowledge or training; unlearned: *an ignorant man.* 2. lacking knowledge or information as to a particular subject or fact: *ignorant of quantum physics*. 3.

uninformed; *unaware*. 4. due to or showing lack of knowledge or training: an ignorant statement" (ignorant, 2012a).

It is with phrases like "destitute of knowledge" (ignorant, 2010) and words like "lacking," (ignorant, 2012a) built right into the contemporary definitions of the word 'ignorance' that we begin to see how, from its Latin root in words that meant much more simply "not know" (ignorance, 2001-2013; Ayto, 1990, p. 293), ignorance has come to be associated not just with deficit, but with baseness and with failure. This is, of course, likely why we even have an expression like 'ignorant bastard' so readily available in our language. Molly Quinn (2011) is more explicit still, in the negative implications of being ignorant:

> ignorance is likely not anything one wants to embrace, nor have ascribed to him or her. Related words of description include: dull, credulous, bestial, barbarian, ill-mannered, uncouth, feeble, and wanton. Ignorance, like knowledge, we might add, is in this way embodied, such that moral and ethical indictments and antagonistic identity markers are attached to it. Thus, the ignorant is subject to admonishment, susceptible to manipulation and enslavement, possessed of vulgar speech, destitute of knowledge. Negligence, violence, calamity, and evil issue from mere ignorance, which is affiliated with darkness, blindness, and hell. (p. 36)

In this way, she helps us move beyond the observation of the historical transition of how we understand and apply the word 'ignorance'*,* and its variants, to the implications and ramifications of this shift. It is crucial to recognize that it is largely over time that we have come to make direct causal links between

'knowing less' and being *less-than* but, as Quinn states so powerfully, this linguistic evolution represents a far more dangerous social evolution.

If 'knowing less' makes us *less-than* and being *less-than* is commensurate with "lack" (ignorant, 2012a) (with deficit) and affiliates us with "darkness, blindness, and hell" (Quinn, 2011, p. 36) then our acceptance of this definition of the word 'ignorance' forces us to privilege 'knowing' to avoid this fate. To not be perceived as "uncouth," "destitute," or "feeble" (p. 36) we must put knowledge first and always and thus the infinite nature of things we *do not know* becomes a lifelong sentence to an entirely different kind of hell.

In a world where 'not knowing' is so damning and dangerous, humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion are, by necessity, marginalized. In a world where we accept, even a little, even unconsciously, that 'ignorance'/'not knowing' consigns us to "violence" and "calamity" (Quinn, 2011, p. 36), we must all err on the side of arrogance instead of humility. We must all table our natural curiosities and any impulse to creativity so that we may be the first to raise our hands and provide the *answers* we hope are *right* based on what has been taught to us. More than this, we are frequently pitted against one another, and against ourselves, in competition relative to the continued value of summative assessment practice to see who can get the *most* right answers (a space wherein compassion cannot thrive). Further still, if – as often happens in a vast, unknowable, "untotalizable" (Felman, 1987, p. 78), "incomplete" (Miller, 1998, p. 148) life and universe where our "daily stories" (Aoki, 1993, p. 262), "personal practical knowledge," and "secret, sacred, and cover stories" (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p.

172) are not as relevant as are prescribed bodies of knowledge – we cannot put up our hand because we do **not** have the answer then that means we do not know something and if we do not know something then doesn't that make us ignorant? And doesn't being ignorant make us "bestial," "unlearned," a "bastard," and a "barbarian" (p. 36)? And round and round and round we go…

In this journey with the definitions of the word ignorance, it becomes even more obvious why it is so hard to see it as a vehicle for humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion. We carry a lot of quite legitimate – within the context of our mainstream schools especially and despite, as I have said before, there being educative spaces in exception to this rule – fear around not knowing/being ignorant.

Why would we cheer for ignorance defined in these ways?

Further, in this new context, how do we move away from our fears of not having answers? How do we soften our reluctance to admit we don't already know everything? How do we re-negotiate our habits of thinking not only that we *should* know everything but that the infinity of that which is unknown (about the world, about each other, about the universe) can be discovered if only we "divide each of [our] difficulties… into as many parts as possible" and "think in an orderly fashion" (Descartes, 1960, p. 15)? How, in short, do we move into a relationship with uncertainty and ignorance where they can both be seen as a positive force in deep kinship with knowing?

I think it's possible that the first step of this journey is weathered through surrender of the more contemporary definitions of ignorance altogether. To

discover something new (Krishnamurti, 2007, p. 24) an effort must be made to surrender the image of the 'ignorant bastards' who "don't need no learnin' and don't want none" (Fenichel, 2012) lest we, ourselves, become one of them on the topic of ignorance itself.   Instead of seeing ignorance as a deficit to be filled or an enemy to be eradicated (Quinn, 2011, p. 36) we must ourselves become ignorant of ignorance so that we can start again.

Back at the beginning.

When ignorance just meant "to not know" (ignorance, 2001-2013; Ayto, 1990, p. 293); where not knowing had yet to become commensurate with lack and with failure.

It was only when I arrived at this non-judgmental definition of ignorance that I began, myself, to open up and grow. So, please, as we break from this multi-faceted consideration of the word and concept of ignorance, I urge in you a willingness to continue on this journey with me from this place.

While it is, as will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 4, obvious that there are times when ignorance (not knowing) is very damaging or dangerous, even deadly, I am hoping that it is now also more apparent that to own and work from ignorance as a generative philosophical position is a huge part of how we might – and do – acquire the knowledge necessary to avoid those very damages, dangers and that very potential for death. To learn new things we must avoid the comforts, controls and power of closely held certainties – especially about the nature of ignorance itself.

CHAPTER 3: A STEP DEEPER INTO IGNORANCE & CARTESIANISM

I have, thus far, introduced and unpacked some thinking around the figure and thought of René Descartes and of the word and concept of 'ignorance.' It has been, and continues to be, my hope to avoid the firm offer of a fixed, 'knowledgeable' perspective where I could open up the perception of myself as being some kind of 'expert in/on ignorance.' The wish remains, to lay down my stories and thought processes alongside those of other people and to break things open to the potential generativity of ignorance –'unknowing' – as a hopeful, healing way of seeing, knowing, and being in, the world. In this Chapter, I will show myself in conversation with other thinkers touched by relationships to Cartesianism both explicit and implicit. The ultimate goal is to deepen and integrate more closely what has already been opened up about Descartes and about 'ignorance' with more contemporary perspectives on their effects and possible value.

This chapter will also take the idea of 'ignorance as deficit' established in Chapter 2 and reframe those accusations of 'deficit' as a 'double projected certainty' in the hopes that the traditional frame of curing ignorance with knowledge becomes a more complicated and interesting. The desire here, is to allow for a more open vision of an IBW and its possible benefits.

Of the Partial & the Whole

I have come to understand through the research I have done so far about Cartesianism and the possible benefits of an IBW, that the idea that the entirety of

the world and all it contains/supports should, and even can, be divided into neat

categories, understood more clearly by the "solitary pursuit of a singular mind"

(Vitek, 2008, p. 214; Descartes, 1960, pp. 8, 11) and – most importantly –

controlled through human action is a regularly questioned philosophical position.

If not yet in the mainstream in any systemic way, this questioning most assuredly

takes place from various types and levels of marginality where Bill Vitek (2008),

a professor of philosophy at Clarkson University, suggests that:

> The Cartesian revolution marks the beginning of the individual as
>
> sovereign – first in science, then in economics and politics. Much good
>
> has come from this tripartite revolution of ideas, and we would be remiss
>
> to recommend a wholesale rejection. But so too has much trouble come,
>
> particularly in the misunderstanding of complex, living ecosystems, in the
>
> dangerous misapplication of partial knowledge in ways that are difficult to
>
> rescind or recall, and in the harmful effects of believing that the world is a
>
> laboratory or experimental playground. (p. 214)

He makes it evident that this potentially dangerous "partial knowledge" (p. 24)

cannot be more whole because it is gathered and being used in a system that

positions the "individual as sovereign" (p. 24). The implication being that in the

absence of a respect for community and interconnection with a broader living

world, we gather incomplete pictures of our reality. Further, Vitek juxtaposes the

idea of this "partial knowledge" (p. 24) with the idea of using the world as "a

laboratory or experimental playground" (p. 24) and brings forward the idea that

when we separate ourselves from each other and our interdependence with the

world as a whole, we seek and acquire knowledge in ways that are defined by that distance and that separation; in ways that disrespect the deeper knowledge gained through the rich complications of intersubjectivity.

The idea of "partial knowledge" (Vitek, 2008, p. 24) interpreted in this way, helps to illuminate another set of ideas. If we accept that to act on "partial knowledge" (p. 24) can be dangerous, and if we accept that the dangers of "partial knowledge" (p. 24) exist because its incomplete nature is the result of an attempt to view the world "divide[d]… into as many parts as possible" (Descartes, 1960, p. 15) – the world rent into pieces in the name of seeing it more clearly – then there arises two key questions:

1. Can knowledge ever be *whole*?; and

2. What is the nature, shape, relevance and purpose of *that which is unknown*?

David Smith (1999), curriculum scholar and Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta in Teacher Education, echoes and expands on Vitek's (2008) ideas while also pointing toward some directions in which we might go to explore these questions:

> The Western legacy from Descartes has taught us to objectify the world from a position of pure subjectivity, a move which renders human experience of the world to a game between subjects and objects, and ensures the breakdown of genuine communication between persons and of relations between human and natural worlds. Hermeneutically, one speaks instead of the intersubjectivity of everything, of their mutual

interpenetration and influence. To see this, however, requires a particular kind of imaginal discipline, especially an ability to see connections which may not be superficially apparent. That very ability itself requires an openness to experience which goes beyond dependence on conventional categories of explanation or on tradition received as a final word. (Smith, 1999, p. 46)

His invocation of the words "imaginal" (p. 46) and "openness" (p. 46) as well as his suggestion that deeper knowledge and understanding are attained through a movement past surfaces, the comforts of categorization, and the transmission of situational, accepted knowledge as truth (p. 46), point toward the idea that an answer to the first question above might be, "no." If deeper, less "partial" (p. 46) knowledge is attained by being open, imaginative, unwilling to accept superficiality, compartmentalization, or unquestioned transmitted truths – and by an ability to make connections – then knowledge appears rather infinite in nature, ever expanding, not possible to define as complete or 'whole.' For, every time we break through one *surface* we find ourselves in a new space with new surfaces. Ideally, a suggestion to be more imaginative and open is not meant to be finite in nature. Indeed, it would feel odd to say to someone, "I would like you to be imaginative and open but only in the ways I tell you to or until I tell you to stop." Yet, if I am honest and look beyond the surfaces of some of my own education experiences, I have absolutely been told that by many teachers and/or university professors who were, themselves, similarly encouraged and then shut down by the

strictures of accountability and shape of government, and historically, defined curricula.

An example of what I mean here, if one has not already sprung to mind, might be a grade school art project where one is given a range of art supplies in previously chosen colours, textures and shapes, instructed in a few basic project-specific techniques and then told to be as creative as possible in use of both the materials and the techniques so long as everyone, in the end, has made an Easter bunny or, at a different time of year perhaps, a reindeer and so long as everyone finishes the project within a specific amount of allotted time… At a graduate level this same paradox is achieved by the essential basis of academic writing: namely that as academic writers we are enjoined to find new areas, "gaps," in extant research and to fill them with ostensibly *original* research, but only if we can prove that several people, who have written before us, already support and agree with us…

Clearly, as Vitek (2008) says of Descartes's legacy, many important things are learned and connections forged by teaching techniques that impose limits and mandate a connection to the scholars and scholarship that precedes us, so – like Vitek himself and as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis – I do not use these examples to suggest we jettison the good with the bad (p. 214) or continue to live in a way presaged on the belief that knowledge and ignorance can exist without each other (Quinn, 2011, p. 33). I suggest these examples because sometimes these kinds of limits and mandates serve to undermine the very creativity and originality they seek to encourage or, more insidiously, they mask a

fundamental fear of failure, disobedience, change (Eppert, 2008, p. 68) and/or a desire for control in the forms of "order, discipline and work" (Eppert, 2008, p. 69). Further, where they do mask fear of failure, disobedience and change (p. 69), any encouragement of creativity and originality becomes disingenuous. To sincerely encourage openness and creativity one must surrender power and control because, ultimately, genuinely rigorous engagement and creativity has a chaotic and sometimes revolutionary spirit.

Many institutional systems shaped, as Descartes (1960) writes by "custom" (p. 12), including and perhaps especially mainstream systems of formal education, are not inclined to leave themselves vulnerable to the unchecked openness, engagement, curiosity and/or creativity of employees and/or students. Clearly, I am not alone in wondering if we avoid the creation of these spaces for creativity and questioning that David Smith (1999) suggests we need for "articulating the integrity of the world" and to engage in a "pedagogical homecoming" (p. 46) simply because they are too unpredictable and full of too many *unknowns*. *Unknowns*, always a bit scary, are perhaps more frightening now after centuries of, what both Vitek (2008) and Smith (1999) describe as, Cartesian thinking (p. 214; p. 46) has cast knowledge as something regulatory in nature that can provide both the comfort and security of certainty. Those certainties, in their turn, can become a powerfully seductive and soothing, if dangerous, "tradition received as a final word" (Smith, 1999, p. 46).

What is interesting to note, here, is that 'certainty' for René Descartes (1960) himself, was not safe as his pursuit of it set him apart from the

philosophizing of his day which – as already cited earlier – he felt "had not

produced anything that [was] not in dispute and where all was "doubtful and

uncertain" (p. 8) and, subsequently, at odds with the authority figures of his day

(p. 44). As expressed earlier, too, even he felt that deference to "custom" was not

"prud[ent]" (p. 12). He writes that to "reject" the opinions he'd been "receiving

since birth" (p. 12) meant: "[he] would succeed in conducting [his] life much

better than if [he] built only upon the old foundations and gave credence to the

principles which [he] had acquired in [his] childhood without ever having

examined them to see whether they were true or not" (p. 12). What was once new

and revolutionary to him, it would seem, has been altered somewhat by time,

become more staid and – it would seem – its own "tradition received as final

word" (Smith, 1999, p. 46) for us in our time. As such, it may well be in need a

kind of a shake-up or, perhaps, some truly Cartesian "rejection" (Descartes, 1960,

p. 12)…

Of Black Cats in Dark Rooms

Referring to an old proverb which warns that "It is very difficult to find a

black cat in a dark room, especially when there is no cat" (Firestein, 2012, p. 1)

Stuart Firestein, professor of Neuroscience and current Chairman of the

Department of Biology at Columbia University, writes about his belief that

contemporary perceptions of science as an accumulation of absolutes is wrong.

He writes of a popular culture that imagines a scientific "brotherhood tied

together by its golden rule *the Scientific Method,* an immutable set of precepts for

devising experiments that churn out the cold, hard facts" which, in their turn,

"support the edifice of science, an unbroken record of advances and insights

embodied in our modern views and unprecedented standard of living. Science,

with a capital *S.*" (p. 2) He goes on, somewhat bitingly, to attribute this view of

science to various forms of media representation and "high school lesson plans"

(p. 2). More important, however, is how he brings us back to David Smith's

(1999) suggestion that fuller, richer knowledge is attained through deep

engagement, imagination and openness (p. 46) and to my proposed idea (answer

to that first question above) that no body of knowledge is ever complete or whole:

> It's not facts and rules. It's black cats in dark rooms. As Princeton
>
> mathematician Andrew Wiles describes it: It's groping and probing and
>
> poking, and some bumbling and bungling, and then a switch is discovered,
>
> often by accident, and the light is lit, and everyone says, "Oh, wow, so
>
> that's how it looks," and then it's off into the next dark room, looking for
>
> the next mysterious black feline. If this all sounds depressing, perhaps
>
> some bleak Beckett-like scenario of existential endlessness, it's not. In
>
> fact, it's somehow exhilarating. (p. 2)

Firestein introduces this idea of 'exhilaration' and addresses the idea that the

discomforts and surrenders of power inherent to *not knowing* need not define our

relationship *to the unknown*. We need never, he seems to say, be "paralyzed" by

it (Miller, 1998, p. 148). Firestein is, himself, a "capital *S.*" scientist, and – at

least in part – a clear descendent René Descartes. And yet, unlike the Cartesian

notion that the world can only be understood through a strong system "of correct

logical procedure" (Smith, 1999a, p. 29), Firestein (2012) seems to say discovery

and understanding are made through a "bumbling and bungling" (p. 2) and that it

is a scary kind of fun *not* to know things, but instead to wonder about them and

explore. More importantly, Firestein obviously does not believe that discovery

and understanding are anything more than transient states, we never have capital

'*A*' Answers. Whether we use "correct logical procedure" (Smith, 1999a, p. 29)

or not, there is always another "dark room" (Firestein, 2012, p. 2)

Smith and Firestein, in the passages I have shared and discussed above,

and from their divergent fields of Curriculum Scholarship and Neuroscience, have

each shown that *not knowing* is essential because it leaves room for exploration,

possibility and for a coming together – a reintroduction of "the integrity of the

world" (Smith, 1999, p. 46). Claudia Eppert (2008), by drawing attention to the

potential problems and challenges created by a world not drawn together, not

integral, provides a different perspective on these same ideas:

> The mythos of individualism – particularly as it has morphed into a
>
> mythos of the autonomous, rational, materialistic, and secular individual in
>
> the last two centuries – may have exacerbated our fears rather than solved
>
> them. And possibly it is making us, and our environment ill. Western and
>
> American society is challenged to (learn to) attend and heal, particularly if
>
> the projects of social change are to be productive. (p. 61)

In her turn, professor of Education and Jungian Psychoanalyst, Alexandra Fidyk

(2011) helps to define this coming together and reintroduction of "integrity"

(Smith, 1999, p. 46) – this "project of social change" (Eppert, 2008, p. 61) – as

its own kind of knowledge, knowledge held together not by the "autonomous, rational, materialistic and secular" (p. 61) individualism to which Eppert refers, but by situating "oneself in a worldview that includes and values the unconscious, transpersonal, transgenerational, transspecies, feeling, imaginal, and emergent dimensions" so as to "radically reconsider the ways that we come to know and thereby what we know" (Fidyk, 2011, p. 131).

There is no denying that there are times when, as Vitek (2008) points out, to proceed in certain ways and on certain projects with "partial knowledge" (p. 214) can be unhealthy and damaging and I am in no way, at this time or ever, romanticizing *not knowing* as it lives in the types of fearful, lazy, or willfully created and often ideologically founded, gaps in knowledge that routinely cause harm. I am not, to be even more clear, writing in support of racism, bigotry, prejudice, violence, the destruction of ecosystems, cultures or individuals for profit etc. But, I do think it is important to take a moment and consider *how* "partial knowledge" (p. 214) does harm.

A Return to Bullying: Ignorance as Double Projected Certainty

Let us return to the idea of bullying and take the specific example of abuse that is carried out on the grounds that the perpetrators believe that homosexuality is wrong and a violation of religious covenant. It is common, for those of us who do not share this belief – who believe first that no peaceful way of living and loving between human beings can ever be wrong and second that bullying and abuse are themselves a violation – to level accusations of *ignorance* at these

perpetrators. The feeling is that what we perceive as their negative choices and behaviours as regards homosexuality are the direct result of this ignorance. If they 'knew better, 'knew more,' 'knew differently' they wouldn't behave in these abusive and bullying ways. There is often merit in this assertion because the more "dark rooms" we "stumble" into and illuminate (Firestein, 2012, p. 2), the more likely we are to change and grow. This said, I would like to make a case for the fact that there is another way of looking at it that also has merit, whereby if the perpetrators of this bullying and abuse were not so entirely certain that their knowledge of homosexuality being 'wrong' was *true, right, correct* they would not behave as they do. In this way of looking at it, it is knowledge held as certainty, and the individualized narrowing of vision and dissociations from a broader perspective which frequently accompany our most closely held certainties, that inspires the bullying and abuse; it is the unwillingness to ever leave the one room you have already entered and illuminated as if that one room is the whole of the universe.

I contend that among the most dangerous parts of "partial knowledge" (Vitek, 2008, p. 214) are in fact our most closely held certainties. We destroy a rainforest to make way for housing developments, or fast food cattle farms, not simply because 'we don't know better' but because we are absolutely certain that the profits, employment and other economic opportunities for those involved are more important than whatever is being lost.

To live this way, in a contemporary Cartesian state of deeply held and compartmentalized knowledge along with Descartes' (1960) clear bias towards

our being the "the masters and possessors of nature" (p. 45) – but *without* his

equally clear desire to question all existing knowledge (pp. 12, 17) – we might be

perfectly aware of the loss of biodiversity, indigenous agriculture, oxygen

generating flora etc. inherent to our project, we just don't privilege that particular

knowledge because we have decided that other things matter more. We will not,

under circumstances like this ever get to a place where we 'know better' in the

eyes of our critics, because we can always say that we know everything they

know about the potential harms but that 'better' in this scenario is still the

reconfigured use of the land in question. The land developers in this scenario

might easily, and likely would, point fingers at their critics' ignorance about the

long term benefits to human communities through this economic development.

Wendell Berry (2008) might call this "self-induced" form of ignorance, "moral

ignorance, the invariable excuse of which is objectivity" (p. 39). He goes on to

articulate with characteristic wit and candour that:

> Objectivity, considered a mark of great learning and highest
>
> enlightenment, loves to identify itself by such pronouncements as the
>
> following: "You may be right, but on the other hand so may your
>
> opponent," or "Everything is relative," or "Whatever is happening is
>
> inevitable," or "Let me play the devil's advocate." (The part of the devil's
>
> advocate is surely one of the most sought after in all the precincts of the
>
> modern intellect. Anywhere you go to speak in defense of something
>
> worthwhile, you are apt to encounter a smiling savant writhing in the
>
> estrus of objectivity: "Let me play the devil's advocate for a moment." As

if the devil's point of view will not otherwise be adequately represented.)

(p. 39)

My potential sympathies to his positions notwithstanding, what matters most to me here is that it is clear that he does not see himself in the role of the "adequately represented" devil (p. 39). In fact, in my land development scenario above, I feel safe in suggesting that he would position the land developer as the devil living in a clear state of "moral ignorance" (p. 39). For this reason, I again draw attention to the fact that to one who believes powerfully in objectivity and in rigorous, well-considered, human-centric, rational debate, Berry's position is the one that might well be attributed to the limitations and selfishness of the devil.

Seen this way, ignorance becomes a double projected certainty. First, we are certain that there are things it is right/good/appropriate to know and second, we are certain that this knowledge is demonstrably absent in a particular situation or in particular people. Accusations of ignorance, considered in this manner, become just another way to articulate a hierarchical and compartmentalized view of knowledge where the *other* is always the devil…

"You," my opponent would say to me, "do not know what I think you should know and so you are ignorant!" And I, by necessity and unless we can reconfigure our relationship to knowledge and to ignorance, would be forced to point and say the same thing back. From a variety of perspectives – none of which are in any way shape or form "objective" (Berry, 2008, p. 39) – and in keeping with this idea of ignorance as double projected certainty, all of the following statements can be held as 'true:'

People don't know that one religion is better than another.

People don't know that all religions are equal.

People don't how to take care of each other.

People don't know how to boot-strap it and get things done themselves.

People don't know that the woman was dressed in really sexy clothes and flirted with that guy all night.

People don't know that no woman wants to be raped, ever.

But, where, in this space more typically defined as an objective game of devil's advocacy but which might be better defined as a form of *binary dueling*, is the imaginative, exhilarating, deeply seen and experienced, integrating experience of the world about which I, along with the philosophers, curriculum scholars and _S_cientist (Firestein, 2012, p. 2) to whom I have been thus far referring, have been trying to write? How do we move beyond the finger pointing and accusations of knowledge deficit, to try to understand why our 'opponents' *know* such different things than do we?

Does the teenager who bullies another teenager for being gay do so only because they believe God wants them to? Or are they motivated by a need for belonging in their community?   By a fear of being ostracized should they appear to be or believe something different than their community? I do not ask these questions because I think the answers can (or ever should) *excuse* the violence of bullying (I, personally, struggle philosophically even with the idea of violence carried out in self-defence even as I know I would hesitate at nothing to protect the life of my son), but because I am coming to believe more and more that there

can not ever be an end to violence if – whenever we encounter or enact it – we

criticize and rationalize it with mutual accusations of deficit instead of an

invitation for <u>everyone involved</u> to *know more*, grounded in humility and an

awareness – first and foremost – of *our own ignorance*.

> This is the kind of ignorance-based worldview that can help us fathom the
>
> messes we are in, articulate assumptions and processes, entertain questions
>
> and be enriched by them, and imagine new ways and new knowledge.
>
> Humble ignorance can imagine that it might be wrong and hopes that its
>
> community will correct it early enough to avoid harm. It can marvel at
>
> what it sees that it cannot hope to understand or control. It knows that it
>
> must question certainty and jargon. (Heltne, 2008, p. 136)

In the absence of this type of admitted and "humble" ignorance (Heltne, 2008, p.

136), left only to what Ted Aoki (1993) has called our "techno-scientific mind-

set" defined by the inevitable finger pointing and accusations of deficit inherent to

"Cartesian subject-object dualism" (p. 262) where we fail to "beckon questioning

from the ground up" (p. 263), we limit opportunities for growth and healing to

protect our "unprecedented standards of living" (Firestein, 2012, p. 2) and other

parts of our status quos. This type of deep, humble questioning of everything,

when applied to our systems of education in particular "puts not only the structure

of the university but also the structure of curriculum at all levels into turbulence,

opening possibilities for a fresh line of movement for curriculum" (Aoki, 1993, p.

263); opening "lines of movement" (p. 263) away from our entrenched belief in

the knowledge deficit of others expressed by our individual, and communally generated, double projected certainties.

Far from being a negative state of deficit, ignorance becomes "joyful" and inspirational as we allow our certain 'knowings' and 'knowledge' to be de-centered and more deeply embrace an IBW (Vitek, 2008, p. 217), ignorance becomes "defiant [and] rebellious… in the face of the obvious, of certainty, of security and control, of domination" (p. 217).

> "can't you see it right in front of you?" asks the advocate of a KBW?
>
> Replies the advocate of an IBW: "I'm not looking right in front of me."
>
> Joyful ignorance is a first step toward a methodology for ignoring the
>
> obvious, loudest and smallest piece of the universe… (p. 217)

Thus, by widening our view for a moment, and with eyes drawn to that which is less obvious, we return to the second question posited in the first section of this chapter: What is the nature, shape, relevance and purpose of ignorance? A possible answer is that its nature, shape, relevance and purpose is to inspire us to seek (not acquire) knowledge with:

Humility – a fundamental acceptance that we will never know it all, have all the _A_nswers, which allows us to move, with openness and a clear sense of responsibility to ourselves, each other and the world around us, to surrender our attachments and move joyfully from one dark room to another.

Curiosity – the energy and wonder that moves us beyond "that which may not be superficially apparent" (Smith, 1999, p. 46), beyond the familiar, the comfortable and comforting – beyond our closely held certainties.

Creativity – the exhilaration, fear and excitement of following our curiosity toward unanticipated connections, newly generated meanings and action followed, inevitably and invariably, by more discovery and more action; and

Compassion – the sense of sympathy, love mutual responsibility and accountability, of interbeing and intersubjectivity, that returns to us when we cease to see the "individual as sovereign" (Vitek, 2008, p. 214) and begin to work, not from accusations of deficit, but from generative, mutual awareness and respect between ourselves as humans and with the broader living world.

The nature, shape, relevance and purpose of ignorance, as I work and grow alongside it, appears to be to both widen and narrow our view – to see things both big and small (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 169) – so that we can accept the vastness of the universe without ever losing sight of all the individual parts, perspectives, stories of Life that compose that universe. "Compost," writes Tich Nhat Hanh (2008) "helps make the flower, and the flower creates more compost."

> If we meditate, we can see the compost right here and now in the flower
> (…) These are not just words. It is our experience, the fruit of our practice
> of looking deeply. Looking at anything, we can see the nature of
> interbeing. A self is not possible without nonself elements. Looking
> deeply at any one thing, we see the whole cosmos. The one is made of the
> many. To take care of ourselves, we take care of those around us. Their
> happiness and stability are our happiness and stability. (p. 49)

CHAPTER 4: TO FIND, FORGE OR FOLLOW A PATH TOWARD AN IBW

In brief, this section takes what are now, hopefully, more rich and complicated thoughts and perspectives about René Descartes, more contemporary understandings of Cartesianism and a positive, generative type of ignorance, and asks the questions: If we can agree that there might be real value in an embrace of an IBW, how do we moderate this change of epistemological emphasis? Further, what conversations have to happen to engage in a shift like this in a way that is commensurate with the values and qualities of an IBW?

As part of a process of engaging with these questions, I will continue to rely on my own experience, to face and express my own tensions in this writing and I will also explore the concept, definitions and history of the word 'complicity'.

Being Proud to Make Bad Decisions & "Descartes' Ace"

If there might actually be real value in re-framing the word "ignorance" to make it commensurate with humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion and engage in a conscious shift away from a tendency to privilege knowledge and the comforts of certainty – as opposed to the fumbling darkness of unlit rooms and a search for black cats within (Firestein, 2012, p. 2) - to embrace an IBW, how do we make it happen?

Is there a specific *way* to create openness toward an IBW? Or would that be, in and of itself, a problematic return to a linear, controlled,

compartmentalized, simplified, seemingly 'objective' way of getting the job

done? Is not the language of 'getting things done,' of 'accomplishment' and

'successful achievement of goals' also not firmly under the purview of the very

type of Cartesian thinking to which I am trying to bring awareness? Descartes

(1960), himself, in *Discourse on Method* writes that

> when we cannot determine the course which is certainly best, we must
>
> follow the one which is probably best; and when we cannot determine
>
> even that, we must nevertheless select one and follow it therafter as
>
> though it were certainly best. If the course selected is not indeed a good
>
> one, at least the reasons for selecting it are excellent. (p. 20)

He writes this because he prizes an ability to "be as firm and determined in [his]

actions" (p. 19) as he can be. It is not hard to see that to follow this urging is to

place enormous value on being confident and decisive rather than on the quality

of the decisions being made and/or their respectfulness to a broader community

and world.   It is also not hard to see how this type of thinking can lead to a

diminishment of contemplative practice and a lack of foresight. But, even still,

how urgent is it, really, that we so shake our epistemological foundations to

embrace 'ignorance'? In education? In the broader world? Wendell Berry

(2008) seems to think it's pretty imperative and offers his own type of *directions*

when he writes:

> We, each of us severally, can remove our minds from the corporate
>
> ignorance and arrogance that is leading the world to destruction; we can
>
> honestly confront our ignorance and our need; we can take guidance from

the knowledge we most authentically possess, from experience, from

tradition, and from the inward promptings of affection, conscience,

decency, compassion, even inspiration. (p. 46)

And I love his words. I am moved by his call for a relationship to knowledge that

is grounded in "experience", which recognizes (but does not cling to) "tradition,"

that recognizes the importance of "affection, conscience, decency, compassion

and even inspiration" (p. 46). But, are we really destroying the world? Are we

destroying the world or – more accurately – destroying our hopes as human

mammals – along with many other forms of flora and fauna as they currently exist

– to continue *in the world as we know it*? Isn't it far more likely that we will

destroy only ourselves and life *as we know it* than it is likely we will be able to

truly deaden the planet itself with our actions?

Perhaps I am being insufficiently alarmist about the record breaking polar

ice cap melting. Or have spent too long away from the current literature of how

life forms and under what circumstances it is even possible. Perhaps we are

headed toward a planet as violently inhospitable to life as is Venus and believe

you me, I feel the urgency to change our habits of mind and behaviour every time

I watch my son drink water from the tap without a thought given to where that

water comes from, or use the electricity in his computer which, in Alberta at this

time, is large generated from coal. But I think this idea that we can kill the whole

world may well be yet another inflated, self-important view grounded in a

Cartesian idea of humans as top and centre of life on Earth and not just one more

humble *part* of life on Earth; the "masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes, 1960, p. 45).

I struggle when I think about 'saving the world' through some system of "correct logical procedure" (Smith, 1999a, p. 103) or even through a turn toward ignorance if that turn were to take on a *correct logical procedure*. I worry about this work in which I have been engaged all these years and in so many ways. It is reasonable to say that I began my relationship to ignorance in a childhood where I was educated at home – flexibly, organically, as often outside the home as within it in a way that was deeply explorative and reciprocal – by my parents. It is equally safe to say that as I explore ignorance now, in a Faculty of Education at an accredited Canadian university, my journey is in much closer relationship to deeply hierarchical systems that are generally disconnected from the broader, living world. More than being in relationship to those hierarchies, my journey is, in fact, *beholden* to them. But, even as I worry about the limits and structures of this more recent context, I also carry with me an intention to pursue these ideas in new directions for as many more years as are available to me and in whatever new contexts arise. I see this flexibility and temporal awareness as being an important characteristic of an IBW and I want to be even the tiniest particle of energy in a movement toward an integral world (Smith, 1999, p. 46), a world that, through this integrity, recognizes itself as whole and bound to itself by and through all its parts – including but not exclusive to humanity. I wish to be even a fractional part of a world that might actually not only discover, but *create*, something new (Krishnamurti, 2007, p. 24)...

A deeper worry, though, is that this movement will become not a *tending toward* but a "*M*ovement," that it will turn into its own "global method" (Rancière, 1991, p. 27) or "How-to Not Know" and "Ignorance" curriculum kits to be sold in education magazines (Jardine, 2000, p. 63) with taglines like "Bungling and Bumbling our way to Higher Achievement!" or "Probing and Poking the Environment back to Health!" (Firestein, 2012, p. 2) because

> [i]n trying to overturn the false optimism and many errors, injustices, and ecological disasters that have resulted from this system, an impressive array of critics – from Marxists, human rights activists, and spiritual leaders to environmentalists and indigenous peoples – has attacked one or more of the usual offenders: the extractive/polluting economy, the injustices of capitalism, the mistreatment of animals, and the specter of running out of oil, for example. But, each time an attack comes, the Western defenders rely on Descartes' ace. Yes, we are told, there may be injustices in the world, or leaky factories, or shrinking oil and freshwater reserves, and abuse of animals. But the thinking mind – especially when linked with other thinking minds (the more the better!) – will overcome all these limits and problems. (Vitek & Jackson, 2008, p. 3)

"Descartes' ace" (p. 3), defined this way, makes things seem somehow simple. All we need to do, it suggests - and as Descartes himself articulates at times in his way – is to keep problem-solving together to make clear decisions. Even if they are "bad" decisions, or only "probably best" (p. 20), so long as we are positive and keep moving forward we are doing the right thing and will prevail. This

leaves me caught in a bind. I am stuck between my belief that there are things we can and must do, changes we can make to the foundations of our thinking and ways of being in the world that will help restore "the integrity of the world" (Smith, 1999, p. 46) and my fear that I will be yet another person who unconsciously plays "Descartes' ace" as Vitek and Jackson (2008, p. 2) define it in order to *make those changes happen* regardless of what else might change.

I am aware now, too – having confronted my ignorance about what Descartes (1960) says himself in *Discourse on Method* rather than how this work has been taken up since – that to play his "ace" as it is defined above means hewing more to Descartes' preference for confident, decisive action over quality and forethought in decision-making (pp. 19-20) rather than to his belief that "our interest should extend beyond the present time, and that it is well to avoid things which may bring some profit to the living when it is done with the intention of profiting our descendants still more" (p. 48). I am afraid of this more simplified vision of "Descartes' ace" (Vitek & Jackson, 2008, p. 3) – where there is little room for contemplation of what will profit our descendants more than it will profit us in the here and now (Descartes, 1960, p. 48) – because, like so many of us in the West, I have been steeped in it so deeply that I cannot always tell, even now with my awareness of these matters so heightened, if I am thinking clearly and from my own ignorance or ready to give in to the pressures to take action and make firm decisions (pp. 19-20) simply because, nearly 400 years later, this is still perceived as a virtue.

Arguments, Points, and a New Complicity

Throughout this research and writing, I feel myself work consciously away from a rhetorical habit to make clear, persuasive 'arguments' because arguments are about the binary of winners and losers, about coercion and manipulation. I try not to shape my ideas as 'points' because things that come to a point are, by their nature, sharp and narrow and potentially hurtful. Those with whom I have shared these thoughts about an IBW and an attendant turn toward humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion who find them valuable, often respond with the idea that I need to come up with – that there *absolutely needs to be* – more broad and effective application strategies; that change cannot come quickly enough. While I share the sense of urgency and acknowledge that my ideas carry the power and sweep of a revolutionary *spirit*, I also feel it is "Descartes' ace" (Vitek & Jackson, 2008, p. 3) which points toward speedy, generalizable solutions to problems in the first place. A revolutionary spirit, in other words, is not the same as the violence – intentional and unintentional – often precipitated by actual revolution. The catch here is that to try to solve our crises with the same basic thinking patterns that caused them in the first place is a far greater problem because, "Our damages to watersheds and ecosystems will have to be corrected one farm, one forest, one acre at a time. The aftermath of a bombing has to be dealt with one corpse one wound at a time" and "To imagine that destructive power might be made harmless by gathering enough power to destroy it is of course perfectly futile" (Berry, 2008, p. 45).

This very dilemma evokes one of the greatest challenges – yet simultaneously beautiful truths and exquisite responsibilities – that lives at the heart of trying to answer this question of how we de-center (without aiming to destroy) some of the dominant traits of a KBW and introduce more of the qualities inherent to an IBW. It calls attention to the idea that we are all – each and every one of us – complicit in the shaping of the world. We are complicit when we fail to see that the very nature of a call for widely applicable strategies may well be both emblematic, and a cause, of our problems. It is also possible to see us as complicit when we enact a strategy that is too broad, too neglectful of individual experience, specificity, difference, diversity and nuance, and when we cover over the inevitable failures of broad strategies with language like 'side effects' or 'collateral damage.' But, before we continue in this vein, let's inform the beliefs on offer here with a definition and redefinition of complicity:

"complicity: *noun* [*mass noun*] the fact or condition of being involved with others in an activity that is unlawful or morally wrong: *they were accused of complicity in the attempt to overthrow the government"* (complicity, 2010).

Worthy of note, in this context, is that the example offered above of "complicity" being used in a sentence is about the profoundly revolutionary act of overthrowing government. Originally though, etymologically, the shared action inherent to complicity lived without the judgmental overtones of being "unlawful" or "morally wrong" (complicity, 2010). The etymology of complicity is as follows: "mid 17th cent.: from Middle English *complice* '' an associate' ', from Old French, from late Latin *complex*, *complic-* '' allied' ', from Latin

complicare "' fold together'" (complicity, 2010). It evokes the more harmonious

ideas of being allied, associated and – most beautifully – *folded together* without

illegality or immorality as motivation, inspiration or binding force. Notable, here,

too is the suggestion, made through juxtaposition, that an "unlawful" (complicity,

2010) act is somehow commensurate with actions that are "morally wrong"

(complicity, 2010), as if to rigorously question law is not, itself and oftentimes, an

action based on various forms of morality. This reverberates with the ideas I have

already put forward about the challenge to encourage true curiosity and creativity

in schools when that very license, once given, will naturally open up the

possibility for students to use their genuine curiosity and creativity to question the

authority of the very people and systems who purport to have the right to *grant*

them their curiosity and creativity in the first place.

It appears that 'complicity,' the most specific word we use to describe a

banding together to challenge authority, has grown from meaning only that people

have *come together* into a word that bears the implication that not only is it

crucial to keep an eye on people who create alliances, because they may well try

to challenge or subvert authority, but which draws a natural-seeming line between

challenging authority and immorality. It is interesting, too, that not long in time

after Descartes (1960) published *Discourse on Method* – where he made his bid to

rigorously, logically divide the world into smaller and smaller pieces so as to gain

more clarity and find more truths (p. 15) – a word came into existence that was

derived from the idea of association and a "folding together" (complicity, 2010).

Fully aware that there may well be a poetic leap in this, I cannot help but ask, did

this new word that originally implied being "allied" and encompassed the idea of a *folding together* (complicity, 2010) come, over time, to be associated with law-breaking and immorality because the nature of Cartesian thinking, whether Descartes himself intended it to or not, criminalizes the very idea of *wholeness*?

From a slightly different angle, have we allowed the idea of challenging the status quo that lives in the word and act of the official contemporary definition of 'complicity' to become commensurate with law-breaking and immorality because the resultant fears of being judged or jailed *for being complicit* allow those in positions of power to continue to privilege existing forms of knowledge and certainties? Because it is safer for those privileged certainties if people do *not* fold themselves together and ask questions? Because in the absence of a rigorous awareness and a conscious effort to question our assumptions, as Descartes (1960) models so clearly (pp. 12, 17), it is far more easy to perpetuate the comfortable illusion of laws and justice systems that are balanced and blind, to hold close our certainties and live by accepted truths; to pretend that all the rooms worth visiting are well lit and explored and that, therein, all the important black cats have already been found (Firestein, 2012, p. 3).

I don't expect that there is a finite answer to these – or any of my – questions. I allow my thoughts to go in these directions, and ask that you come along, because I think it is just this type of observation and inquiry into both historical and contemporary word definitions that helps to configure what I mean when I say that an embrace of an IBW forces us to reckon with our perpetual complicity in the shaping of the human world. Whether or not my interpretation

of the how the definition of 'complicity' changed from its origins in the mid 17th century is 'correct' or not, I feel as though it becomes hard to deny that we shape and perpetuate the world simply by using the words we do in the ways that we do. To be clear, by my use of the word 'simply' I do not mean that it is a simple process by which language serves to shape human life. I mean that by not thinking deeply – openly, imaginatively (Smith, 1999, p. 46) – about the words we use it is easy to be passive *as human life takes shape*.

It is easy to think that human life is not only separate from, and 'above,' all other life on Earth (Vitek, 2008, p. 214; Descartes, 1960, p. 45) – with the power to save or destroy (Berry, 2008, p. 46) – but that human life *just happens*. That, to return to the much earlier example, the accelerated pace of living and learning in the 21st century (Alberta Education, 2011-2014, p. 3) is a given and not a choice we make over and over again, day after day, decision by decision, unquestioned word by word. This type of complicity is perhaps complicity at its most dangerous because it no longer begins with its etymologically rooted conscious *folding together* of people. It rejects our implicit togetherness, interbeing, intersubjectivity, collusion and alliances and the importance of "co-composing, relational ethics, multiple perspectives, tensions, not fixing and replacing but evolving and shaping, slowing down and careful, deep attending" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, pp. 229-230) to become a complicity which – paradoxically – happens passively and from entrenched states of disconnection and isolation.

In my own definition of the word complicity, therefore, I begin with the idea that we all, always, work together whether we do it consciously or not and add in this awareness of passivity as its own shared, occasionally (often) immoral, action – an idea which is, in fact, quite common in many anti-bullying programs (Public Safety Canada/ Sécurité Publique Canada, 2008). We are complicit in the things we do and say as well as being complicit in all that we do *not* do or say because

> you and I have made this society; it is the result of our actions, of our thoughts, of our very being, and as long as we are merely trying to reform the product without understanding the entity that has produced it, we shall have more diseases, more chaos, more delinquency. (Krishnamurti, 2007, p. 33)

It is in attendance to this idea that we make society (p. 33) where we begin to see the beautiful truths and exquisite responsibilities of this redefined complicity. For, it is not just through "understanding" (p. 33) who we are and how we function that we can move toward a healing and reintegration of the world, but with our ability to act on that understanding with the same humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion that helps us to achieve this type of deeper understanding in the first place.

Seen in this light, ignorance – as I have been trying to develop it – becomes not only a 'way-of-seeing' and a hopeful and potentially generative epistemology but also an ontology; a way to understand, view *and live in* the world. Moreover, when the negative connotations of complicity become

entangled with the weighty responsibilities of wholeness, the positivity of interbeing, intersubjectivity and interconnection, we can be emboldened with the knowledge that, just as the compost is always visible in the flower, we *are* the world and the world *is* us (Nhat Hanh T. , 2008, p. 49): No dualisms, hierarchies or compartmentalizations. Neil Shubin (2013), associate dean of biological sciences at the University of Chicago, known for his work in the fields of paleontology, developmental genetics, and genomics (p. 227), speaks of how atoms bind together to form molecules and/or help molecules bond with each other and goes on to support this philosophical idea of interbeing:

> These daily trades define the reactions between the planet's atmosphere,
> its climate, and the metabolisms of every creature on Earth. When you eat
> an apple, electrons from that material course through your cells to drive
> the metabolism to power your body. The electrons inside the apple to
> begin with were derived from minerals in the ground and the water that
> fell from the sky. The electrons in both have cycled through our world for
> eons. And all of these came about well before the formation of the planet,
> the solar system or even the stars. (pp. 27-28)

His description of electrons allows for an even deeper, more multi-faceted, understanding of the fundamental nature of our interconnection with all living beings which can further encourage us to view complicity as an ever-shifting balance between isolated, unthinking, passive, inaction and responsible action taken in community with, and on behalf of, other living beings. Complicity becomes deliciously complicated as it ceases to be something for which we might

'get caught' and instead becomes an honourable and beautifully shared mutual responsibility to which we can aspire. More specifically from my position as academic student and researcher, I find affinity with the idea that

> [w]e are not merely objective inquirers, people on the high road, who
>
> study a world lesser in quality than our moral temperament would have it,
>
> people who study a world we did not help create. On the contrary, we are
>
> complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake
>
> ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a
>
> better world. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61)

Defined this way, complicity also becomes an eminently acceptable component in an ontology of ignorance, one which compels us to aspire to something 'better' (p. 61) in a way that is not – by virtue of the humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion at its 'ignorant' foundations – necessarily presaged on the familiar narratives of technological progress or a Western cultural tendency to privilege action and productivity (Eppert, 2009, p. 206; Descartes, 1960, pp. 19, 20). We might choose an approach with a conservationist spirit, one that aspires to "consuming less, acquiring less, producing less, wasting less and generally doing less of all those things that tax and drain us and the environment" (Eppert, 2009, p. 206).   But a conservationist spirit is not enough in and of itself. As Claudia Eppert (2009) describes the requirements of accepting the possibilities of *wu-wei* /"nonaction" (p. 206) so too do I feel about life lived from an IBW:

> it demands of the self the very difficult and long-embodied effort of
>
> working through and letting go of destructive ego-based emotions,

thoughts, behaviors. Skill, self-discipline, and persistence are necessary

for nonaction, for yielding, and for balance. Nonaction is not opposed to

activism, but rather can productively inform it… It is thus guided by

gentleness rather than violence, insight rather than confusion, calm rather

than rage, humility rather than arrogance. (p. 206)

A Pause to Sheepishly Play My Own Devil's Advocate…

Perhaps it is at least in part an answer to the call for "self-discipline" or for

a "letting go of destructive ego-based emotions" (Eppert, 2009, p. 206) but, at this

point I find that I have an intense urge to play "devil's advocate" (Berry, 2008, p.

39) to my own work and take a moment to 'point' out that there may be a kind of

hypocrisy in offering, as I do in my above citation of Neil Shubin, "Scientific"

(Firestein, 2012, p. 2) support for the philosophical and spiritual principles of

Buddhism for surely in purporting a perspective that privileges all that I attribute

to ignorance, where I suggest we aim to avoid 'argument' and duality, I should

not feel the need to bolster my position with the perceived empiricism of Western

science. My inner devil cannot help but bid me to ask myself: did you really

include Shubin's perspective to 'deepen understanding' (Krishnamurti, 2007, p.

33; Smith, 1999, p. 46) of interconnection and interbeing? Or, did you do it

because it soothes the still-angry 13 year-old within you – even though you now

know how much more complicated and situated were his ideas – when some of

Descartes most prestigious descendants *agree with you*?

My response to this devil's advocacy – beyond my decision to write about it as part of my process of living with and alongside ignorance myself – is to remind myself that science is both a philosophy and a spirituality, just as Buddhism, with its imperatives to observe carefully and look deeply at reality is not in any way anathema to science. Francisca Cho (2012) writes:

> Science-friendliness is entirely appropriate to traditional Buddhist thought and practice, but this does not entail embracing the positivist, science-as-truth mentality that is so strong in current society. The Buddhist epistemological tradition has been consistently vigilant against reifying any form of human expression into an absolute truth. This is where Buddhist empiricism diverges quite broadly from the western scientific kind, which overwhelmingly takes empirical observations to be perceptions of objective, mind-independent reality. In contrast to this empirical realism, the Buddhist variety is sensitive to the fact that the mind is indispensable and inescapable for the process of knowing itself. (p. 540)

And this inspires another question: Which way of relating to this choice I made to cite both Buddhist monk and Scientist might be more appropriate to an IBW as I have been defining it?

- The devil's advocacy of calling attention to my Western empiricist urge to judge and devalue myself for my seeming to delight in being able to use Descartes 'children' against him and all subsequent analysis; or

- simply allowing the Buddhist perspective to live alongside the

  Western scientific one and leave room for their presence together to

  create its own perspective and meanings in the minds and experience

  of my readers?

I would say that the latter is more in keeping with the non-violence, insight and

calm of "nonaction" (Eppert, 2009, p. 206) and with the spirit of humility,

curiosity, creativity and compassion of my proposed version of an IBW.

Humble, because it situates me as one who does not presume to have all

available perspectives (including those of the devil (Berry, 2008, p. 39))

nor does it make it my responsibility to try to do as much of the research

and thinking for my readers as possible (even if I often feel – however

erroneously perhaps – that this is what my university wishes me to do);

Curious, if for no other reason than it invites wonder about how a

Vietnamese Buddhist monk and an American associate dean of biological

sciences have arrived at such similar positions from such divergent paths

(what amazing stories those would be shared side-by-side);

Creative because it asks our minds to make its own generative

connections between, and with, flowers, compost, apples, animal

metabolisms, earth, air and stars and proceed from there; and

Compassionate in that it steps me, and anyone else who shares in this

text, back from sharpened points ready to 'poke holes' in anyone's

'arguments' and brings us closer to the challenge and responsibility of a

holistic, mutually accountable complicity with each other, with my text

and with the texts I have chosen to cite.

This recognition that an avoidance of 'argument' and sharp 'points,' in order to

nurture a humble, curious, creative and compassionate perspective built on

ignorance, can still lead to deeper understanding and growth is important. It

means that by living and thinking differently we can come to know our world

differently, more wholly, and without sacrificing the rigorous observation and

strength of Scientific Method or through the exclusion of the poetry and beauty

within philosophy and spirituality. If any good comes from my urge to play

devil's advocate against myself, it is in the way it leads me back into myself,

makes me – once again – accountable to habits and functioning of my own mind.

My urge to play my own devil's advocate, puts me in close touch with my own

conflicts and stories and presses me to be bear conscious witness to how this urge

is, itself, violent in nature and unnecessary to my growth; that there are other

ways to get there; that I can choose a different type of conversation (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 136).

A Return to My 20 Year-Old Self: One Particular Type of Conversation & Why
She Thought Ill of Scientists

I am here reminded, again, of the first year of my undergraduate degree. I

was a film major in a fine arts program with a minor in English and it seems to me

that I had more than one conversation with first and second-year students of

chemistry, physics, engineering and mathematics where the overall tone was that

science is more challenging and valuable a program of studies than are art and literature. I can see now, especially in light of writing this thesis, that these remembered conversations were, of course, being built on the feelings I had had about my "fundamentally artistic, deeply emotional nature always [feeling] out-of-step with what school wanted from me; what, indeed, the whole human world expected of me" (from p. 27 of this text) that had found a nemesis when I first encountered a very one-dimensional, and himself compartmentalized, René Descartes in my Grade Nine math textbook.

In these university, student union pub, conversations though, the stated rationale for this belief that sciences were *better* than the arts was largely expressed by phrases like, "In art, it's all about the teacher's opinion" and "art is completely subjective." The implication, at times, was that in art and literature, you don't really need to "learn" anything, you just need to impress your teacher to do well/get 'good grades.' At other times, it seemed there was a direct link in the minds of these would-be opponents to artistic education, between 'having answers' and what constitutes 'valuable knowledge' and between getting more things 'right' than 'wrong' and being smart.

At least one unspoken question that can be backed out of these conversations is: How do you know you're smart if you can't ever know with certainty that you got something 'right?' Moreover, not one of us engaged in those conversations (debates) ever questioned the intrinsic *value* of knowing you are smart or of getting good grades… And right here, engaged with only a fraction of this formative story from my youth, I can see the seeds of a journey

that have lead me to an exploration of the Buddhist belief in Right View as the absence of all views (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71); that have lead me to call for all of us – all of the time – to learn to live with uncertainty and discomfort and, I can see now, to work towards a way-of-being that will no longer create people who believe intelligence is tied to a steady parade of 'right answers.' This relationship to 'right answers,' in fact, in conjunction with my original relationship with René Descartes and these conversations with scientific peers in my undergraduate years, led to some of my own worst prejudices.

For example, for a long time – and despite the fact that I voluntarily took physics even after it was no longer mandatory and had always done well in math – I had formulated a defensive position about 'scientists,' defining them as arrogant, small-minded, fact-peddlers who don't understand that there is nothing harder to do as a human being than to live and wrestle with the uncertainties, debates, and instability of life and learning. I was sure that all of those qualities and abilities – and so many more – live in close relationship to the fundamentals of a truly artistic education because though

> we have made much of the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting the times); we
> have had art as a hammer (social protest); we have had art as furniture
> (something to hang on the walls); and we have had art as a search for the
> self. There is another kind of art, which speaks to the power of
> connectedness and establishes bonds, art that calls us into relationship.
> (Gablik, 1991, p. 114)

I was fairly sure, at the time, that arrogant, small-minded, fact-peddlers weren't even capable of understanding what Gablik (1991) expresses in the passage above. And, if all scientists were, in fact, arrogant, small-minded and only concerned with an accumulation and dispensing of facts, then perhaps that might have been true. But, over the years, I have met some pretty amazing scientists in person, through books and the Internet. I have come to understand that the more narrow definition of 'scientist' that I encountered in my undergraduate experience, and which had given rise to my own intense prejudices, is not the only definition. I came, in short, to face my own double projected certainties and to discover that my narrow definition is not the only definition. It had more to do, in that particular context, with the summative assessment strategies and accountabilities of formal education than it did with science. It was a perspective of science and scientists built a very narrow understanding of René Descartes' (1960) *Discourse on Method*, on a narrowed 'Cartesianist Perspective' that – in keeping with his 'method' (p. 15) – broke apart his theories into ever smaller pieces and, thereby, removed Descartes' deeply spiritual and politicized need to prove the existence of God (p. 26), erased all his fundamentally human contradictions; made simple what was in no way ever simple.

Ultimately, it became clear to me that the pursuit of useable, transmittable, testable facts was never truly the goal of scientific exploration. Science, as Stuart Firestein suggests, suffers from what could be defined as 'bad publicity' (Firestein, 2012, p. 2) and so, it turns out, do the arts. Otherwise, why would a father write in to an advice column I once read to ask, "My son wants to go to art

school. Am I right for refusing to fund a worthless education?" (Bartender, 2011, p. 88). I have known for some time now that science is perceived erroneously as being about *answers* and yet, even knowing this, not long ago in this very document, I was still admitting to my 'surprise' that Firestein, a "*S*cientist" (p. 2) in a high ranking position at a well-known American university, shares my belief in the exhilarating abundance of that very instability of life and learning.

This seems living testament to my ongoing insecurities relative to the knowledge dominance of my culture and its marginalization of the things I feel are my strengths and draws me closer to my own motivations and purposes in this work that I am doing – this ignorance project where ignorance is its own way of knowing and where there will always be more 'ignorance' than answers. It seems that in human life, this is always the case when we allow for the richness and diversity of experience to permeate our knowing. When we stop trying to win arguments and make points and begin to listen and observe with presence and mindfulness – with humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion – we find untold riches, begin to feel more connected and to find space for change: "in a process of forbearing, of not shutting down what might be; we are in a process of continuous inquiry into the meeting of, and through this meeting, the potential remaking of lives" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 233).

Fiction, Biography, Karma and One Step at a Time

For just over two and a half years I lived with my then-partner in London, England in a two room flat in Islington. The flat had been fashioned from the top

floor of a three story Victorian home by its owners. We walked through their home to get to ours, past studies and bedrooms, past their bathroom and on up the final flight to a small landing off of which were two doors: the door to our bathroom and the door to our flat. I have many memories of being towel-wrapped and dripping as I left the bathroom to be met, however briefly, by the smell of pipe smoke, the occasional surly meow from our landlord and landlady's cat, before I opened the door to our flat and snuck in. Our flat smelled like us, I suppose, but it's main characteristic was that it didn't smell like the rest of the house which was not our house despite our living constantly through it to get to our own.

Our landlord and landlady were both writers. He, a playwright of, from what I could gather, modest acclaim who was also once an announcer on BBC radio and she, a biographer and former editor of a fairly well-known magazine for some time before that. They were both delightful to be around and very welcoming to us, and to *our* cat who would occasionally break free of our flat and wander in the dark nooks of their home, finding himself under their bed in the middle of one night after being terrorized by *their* cat...

They were both very accomplished in their use of the English language, in all that they did with it, even little notes about the garbage or electricity bill left for us in the front hall had a rhythm, a cadence and structure that made me jealous. Parsimony, clarity, flow, simplicity, elegance… Delightful. Inspiring. In a conversation with my landlady I mentioned my feelings about how well British writers of novels, newspapers and magazines, wield their words. I came

later to find that the qualities I loved so much about the writing I encountered in London, were undermined by what I discovered was a kind of smugness, a self-satisfaction wrought of success at wielding words well but without any real connection to why they were being wielded in the first place… In any case, my landlady and I were talking about writing and how very, very good some of the writing was. I mentioned her notes by the front door as being on my list of good reads for the week. She laughed. We wound up talking about being a biographer and uncovering things about a life – a real, lived, human life. She said that many people over the years had suggested that she should write fiction. They said that her handle on language and attention to detail, her general quality as a writer, would make for some very exciting fiction indeed. I then became privy to why she would never write fiction.

She described how once you've delved deeply into a human life, found yourself buried in an individual's correspondence, his/her journals – to which you were only given access because your other research into this person shed long-delayed light on that person's family history in ways that made his/her descendants grateful enough to finally share that kind of biographer's bounty – you realize that you cannot possibly ever make anything up that will come close to what people really do and say. A real, human life will just always be more dull and predictable, more vivid and surprising, more deep and fundamentally unimaginable than any imagined fiction.

One could, I suppose, question the limits of her imagination… But, one could also just sit and breathe on this idea that the world and people have an

infinite number of stories to tell, ideas to share, things to offer. One could stay

with that breath and acknowledge that "thinking is already action; speech is

action; and bodily movement is action" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 86). One could then

add to this the idea that to be mindfully aware of the breath you are taking *is*

insight, especially in a world where so few of us are truly aware that we are

breathing (p. 96). The Buddhists call this action "karma," and include in the

meaning of "karma" not just the actions themselves, but the *results* of those

actions (p. 86).

   "Karma" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 86) I think, is a major facet of encouraging

an embrace of an IBW to compliment our other views. There is no real 'point'

asking "How do we make it happen?" Because it has already happened… to me

and in little and larger amounts to others each and every time I think, speak and

move with the humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion of ignorance. This

whole Chapter has, in spirit, been a living practice of ignorance as I have

questioned everything from the very idea of *broadly applicable strategy* to my

own, very personal motivations for being on this journey. As I have shared my

personal stories and memories in more or less detail, made myself consciously

complicit with the life I have lived, I have also held myself accountable to the

limitations and capacities of my own mind.

   This, I think and if there is any 'way', is how we make it happen: One

person, inextricably tied to the whole living breathing world, at a time. One

shared story, that inevitably combines many stories and ideas, at a time. One

mindful breath at a time in an environment encouraged by this practice to be,

itself, progressively more able to meet those breaths, ideas and stories with humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion.

> Perhaps philosophy is (also) this: bringing the things that can be seen and the things that can be said, the perceptions of the senses and names and definitions, things and words, the world and books together and rubbing them hard together; and engaging in this act with others who are also keen to make an effort in friendly discussions without rivalry or envy, without aiming to arrive at an agreement, without striving to be right, simply conversing. (Larrosa, 2011, p. 170)

CHAPTER 5: AND BACK HOME TO EDUCATION

As I continue to work with the concepts introduced, opened up and expanded in the prior four chapters I aim to bring conversation back, more consciously, to mainstream schooling and to the broader idea of education. More so, even, than in previous chapters, this section will be rich in story, anecdote, wonder and theorizing. Further, and in continuation of an effort to revisit and unpack the words we use and how we use them, I will - as I have done previously for 'ignorance' and 'complicity' – turn my eye toward a renewed and expanded relationship with the words 'education', 'educate', and 'educator'.

Of Rubrics, Rule Bending and Systems with a Life of their Own

When people I don't know very well ask me what I do I usually tell them I am finishing up a masters in education and starting a Ph.D.. I am also a mother and have an established job history as a graphic designer, photographer and communications strategist. I've made films and worked in food service. I've owned my own business, been an actress with an agent and lived in four cities on two different continents. I've had two serious, long term relationships with men, have been privileged, over the years, to know the company of four different cats and briefly kept company with a very sweet-souled dog. But when strangers ask you what you do, that's not what they mean and school, as mentioned in the introduction, is my 'job' right now so school is my answer.

Obviously, school means different things to different people on a broad spectrum between 'worst years of my life' to 'wish I could go back' to 'Glad I never left.' For those who have no real love or respect for extended post-secondary education or academic research, or academics, my current occupation might elicit a suppressed sigh, a phantom eye-roll. For those who perhaps view education as an means-to-an-end but who enjoyed their time there and who perhaps wish they too could 'just be in school' instead of 'working,' it occasionally inspires a vague type of nostalgia. For some, and regardless of their relationship to different levels of formal education, it yields genuine interest. But no matter my interpretation of the varied personal responses to my current life trajectory, most people – even the guy who lives in my neighbourhood with the enormous fluffy dog that I like to give scratches too – will err on the side of politesse and ask me what, in education, I am studying.

I usually begin with what I am sure plays as a nervous grin and – depending on what signals they have already given off vis-a-vis graduate education – either calmly say, "I am studying ignorance" or "It's going to sound a bit 'out there,' but it's really pretty grounded actually. I'm studying ignorance." Then, depending on individual situations, available time, and further signals received as to level of interest or engagement, I used to start by saying that our dominant systems of education are geared almost entirely toward proving what we know. Ultimately, I would say, we do not grade our kids on what they want to know, their excitement for learning, but on what they can prove to us that they

know and/or are capable of doing. We do not reward them for asking questions or grade them on the quality of their questions.

Obviously, this perspective on the idea of ignorance has evolved to encompass many other levels and forced a confrontation with one of my oldest enemies in the form of René Descartes and his nascent *Scientific Method*, but returning, as promised, to the example offered in an earlier section, one woman to whom I once said this earlier in my master's program, replied that students are, in fact, graded on their questions. Being a High School Language Arts teacher of approximately 25 years in Alberta, she explained that students spend a good amount of time formulating questions for essays and that without a good question they will not write a good essay and will therefore not get a good grade. Ergo, questions do get graded and rewarded. I asked her if the students received a separate grade for just their question or if they were largely graded on the final product, namely the essay. She said the grades were given for the final product and then went on to talk about new assessment strategies in her district that she found upsetting. She had raised an interesting point, though, and I have since gone on to formulate some follow-up thoughts and wonders.

Typically, there are rubrics that define for students – according to the teacher and, in Canada at least, a provincially mandated curriculum – what are the qualities of a "good" essay. There are grade points allotted to grammar and sentence structure, others for flow and structure of ideas, still more for formal systems of layout and references and still others for what might be called complexity or depth of ideas, quality of analysis and/or research. These types of

rubrics are been provided in some graduate level courses as well and it seems to me that the quality of the question only really affects the latter category pertaining to complexity, analysis and research. Thus, a student who writes clear, grammatically solid sentences in a pleasing and understandable flow, who can spell, and who has exactly followed all directions for margins, page-numbers and referencing can have begun with a fairly superficial question and still, assuming a reasonably even distribution of grade points allotted to each category, get a decent to good grade on the essay. Alternatively, someone with a very ambitious, penetrating topic question might well end up with a terrible grade if their spelling, grammar, organization and ability to follow style guide instructions are lacking.

I know, from listening to another High School Language Arts teacher who grades provincial exams in Alberta, that teachers can and do make allowances for failures in form when an idea is interesting. They will do it because it feels right, because occasionally someone writes an exam essay that makes them smile, or think, and they believe that should be rewarded regardless of how these same students handled the other components of the essay and sometimes just because the other essays that neatly tick all the boxes in the rubrics *bore* them and they wish to reward risk-taking or ingenuity for its own sake. The teachers I have encountered in informal conversation on playgrounds, as friends and/or as colleagues in my program, can, and often do, make room for different styles, abilities and proclivities in their students and I respect that. These are their "secret, sacred, and cover stories" (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 172) and I don't know how they would do their jobs if they didn't find space to be themselves,

honour their own values and their own personal relationships to both their

students and to the curriculum. But, it seems they are almost always consciously

bending the rules, working the system, to do so.

The rules may, in a given time and place, provide more or less flexibility

for teachers to offer this personal and personalized type of assessment, but – in

general – the rules of traditional education systems seem to support a structured,

compartmentalized approach geared toward the privileging of knowledge and

proof of knowledge obtained. Show me, they seem to say, you can write an essay

according to these benchmarks we've established for writing good, clear essays –

only one of which might actually reflect your personal interest or investment –

and I will reward you with a good grade and the possibility of advancement. Do

not do these things and you will fail. These are the rules. A student might happen

to get the right teacher or examiner for his or her temperament and pass regardless

of their ability to successfully meet named benchmarks – and benchmarks may

themselves be shifted to accommodate a variety of needs and abilities as with the

mandates for inclusive education (Alberta Education, 2013) – but, as I say, this is

the result of a *bending* or *negotiation* of the system by the

teachers/administrators/parents in question and not of a true change to the

fundamental nature *of* the system.

At this point, I find myself picturing chimpanzees in the wild who have

the whole resources of their environment available to them in service to their own

motivations and needs, and so taught themselves to make and use tools to get

tasty bugs out of trees whereas a chimpanzee in a lab can only work with what

he/she is given. In the most simple of experiments, this might be a lever that

makes a light go on and a mechanism release a treat. While the chimpanzee is

stuck in the lab, it may or may not pull the lever to get the treat, but let's not

pretend this has anything to do with what the chimpanzee likes and needs to do

for its pleasure and survival in its natural habitat with its peers. Let's not pretend

that the lever, the light and the treat teach us anything salient about that individual

chimpanzee or, to come back to schools, that educational benchmarks teach us

anything real about students, teachers or administrators. At most, educational

benchmarks, might teach us about an ability and/or willingness to run through

mazes (curriculum plans), light lights (successfully achieve pre-set standards) and

eat treats (get good grades or evaluations that allow for advancement).

If anything is revealed by educational benchmarks and standards it is that

'the system' itself – having generated a life of its own from the energy and/or

commitment of all the living beings within it – has no real interest in knowing

anything about those individuals. It's self-perpetuated goal is to decide what it is

valuable to know and find the best and most efficient ways to teach it to the

broadest number of people. Difference in learning ability is increasingly

addressed as an important issue, but in ways that remain beholden to the goals of

the system. New technologies and techniques are used to see that students who

struggle to learn the curriculum as-is, can have the same chances of success with

the curriculum as students who do not need assistance. Though more students are

offered chances for success, and many inclusive education programs represent

enormous progress on the perceptions of students with different learning abilities

that predate them, the attempt being made here is to show that the nature or value of the curriculum, and the overriding goals of the system, are rarely questioned.

While I have heard wonderful stories of exception, the system doesn't, generally ask the student who learns differently than the established 'normal' to teach us how the world looks to him/her so as to change the very definition of what learning and curriculum *are*, instead, strategies are employed to see that that student has free and fair access to our established 'normal.' Just as the scientist in the experiment suggested above does not typically feel that he/she needs to know about that *individual* chimpanzee in order to seek an understanding of what factors influence *a* chimpanzee in the pulling of the lever, our dominant, traditional systems of education do not feel they need to share in the experiential, personal understandings of the people within them in order to seek more, more fair, and better ways for those individuals to attain acceptable levels of the knowledge it has been decided they should know.

Dominant, traditional systems of education, which often do have "institutional qualities over which teachers" (as well as policy makers, parents and students, in my opinion) "may have little control" (Jackson, 1992, p. 8), appear to give preference to the value of the lever and the conditions under which it is more likely to be pulled successfully: "At the heart of the word [curriculum's] educational usage, therefore, lies the idea of an organizational structure imposed by authorities for the purpose of bringing order to the conduct of schooling" (p. 5). Thus, any systemic recognition of the diversity of human experience constitutes a potential threat to this efficiency because it blurs the borders of

presumed objectivity and fairness. This is why, in the introduction to this thesis,

my admission of vulnerability relative to real-world consequences that would

befall me if I fail to get my masters degree in the time allotted, felt out of place

and inappropriate; like I was asking for special treatment. To attend to

individuals, their interests and needs for successful survival and vibrant living, is

messy, complicated and typically interrupts the story of the value of *broadly*

applicable strategies or generalizable ideas. It slows the efficiency of big systems

to acknowledge difference and so, in our at times conscious, at times unconscious,

complicity, we let the system be the system and take it upon ourselves to

negotiate and bend around it in honour of (some) difference and (specific types

of) diversity; to see and acknowledge each other and not just to sort out how best

to pull the lever. Occasionally these negotiations lead to changes in policy, as in

the inclusive education movements, but the fundamental nature of the dominant,

traditional system remains largely unchanged.

Not So Separate Are We

Buried still further, and rarely questioned, in a KBW, is the idea that

teachers, parents, students, pedagogical researchers and policy makers exist as

isolated groups whose primary job is to *do their part* in a state of often

contentious mutual accountability. If, however we stop – "*shamatha* in Sanskrit"

– and still the mind to "see things deeply" and then we *look* deeply at what we see

– "vipashyana" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 29); if we "carefully avoid all precipitation

and prejudgment" (Descartes, 1960, p. 15), we might see that these groups all

exist on a collectively constructed continuum. No matter a currently held primary role relative to education, each of us was, at one time, a child who likely had a first contact with a formal learning environment and a 'first teacher.' Each of us – as we age – has likely made choices and/or contended with realities relative to the having and/or raising of children. Those of us who become teachers, Education researchers and/or policy makers, have consciously chosen to be in the field of education but the vast majority of people in Western culture have, at one point or another, been consciously or unconsciously complicit in that same field of education as students/learners or as parents/caregivers. As our lives progress from childhood into adulthood, many of us find, in fact, that our membership in these groups overlaps and changes frequently, fluidly.

I, myself, am a student of Education and a mother. Two years ago I was also a teacher of music and movement to babies, toddlers, preschoolers and their caregivers. When I spend time with teachers, even teachers I truly admire, I often hear a lot of judgment of parents as being one of the greater limiting factors on hopeful change in curriculum. When I am with parents, even parents I truly admire, I hear a lot of judgment of teachers for their inability to meet a particular child's needs. It is also not hard to see how, or remember times when, administrators blame policy-makers for asking them to carry out policies that are inappropriate to their district and policy-makers who argue that if only the administrators would stick to the letter of the policy and carry it out properly, it would work well… This said, I have no difficulty admitting that some parents are, in fact, a hindrance to changes in curriculum and that some teachers do not

attend to the needs of certain children as well as they might to others. If I "stop," look carefully, mindfully, "deeply" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 29), I can see truth in all the sides of these accusations of ignorance as damaging deficit, these double projected certainties, but still find that, in specific circumstances relative to my care for my son's, or my own, formal education, I can – at times – easily become entrenched in one position or another. Thus, not only do our formal, traditional systems of education fail to honour us in our diverse, personal experience but they model for us to deepen *into* our differences in order to protect our parts and spaces within the compartmentalization of the system.

Inevitably, this allows for the elders in the system to forget they were once children and youth. It allows children and youth to lose touch with a vision of themselves as being elders in-the-making. It allows administrators to forget they were once teachers and students. It allows teachers to forget they may also be parents and one day be administrators, policy-makers or researchers. It allows policy-makers and researchers to forget that curricula are lived experiences that they themselves have had and shared in and that will continue to be lived long after they are gone… It allows us to forget

> the ongoing nests of interrelations between the old and the young, the established and the new. Both gericentrism and pedocentrisim can thus be understood as breakdowns in this living nest of community of relations – attempts to anchor educational theory or practice to a fixed point (e.g., "the child is the center of the curriculum" or "back to basics") instead of in the mediated set of relations themselves. (Jardine, 2000, p. 50)

I do not articulate this and invoke Jardine's (2000) references to "gericentricism" or "pedocentricism" (p. 50) to suggest that no one in the aforementioned categories of teacher, student, parent, administrator, researcher etc. within education thinks about, or acts, on these things. Clearly, I read and cite people (including the citation above) who do, and have already spoken of people who work, negotiate and bend these categorical boundaries every day to live in education in a way they find honourable. I articulate this to suggest that the categorical boundaries, themselves, are what need to be closely examined. As with so much compartmentalization that, whether or not it was René Descartes's intention, was either heralded or exacerbated by Cartesian thinking, they are a philosophical imposition on the more closely observed reality that the child is always visible in the adult, the adult in the child, the teacher right there in the administrator, the school right there in the home – just as the compost is right there in the flower (Nhat Hanh T. , 2008, p. 49).

It is the compartmentalization and boundaries that are the problem, not the human beings who are compartmentalized and bound. It is our relationships to and with each other that matter, not the levers we are meant to pull. Philip Jackson (1992) citing Schubert, writes: "live as if your life were a curriculum for others and balance that principle by realizing that every life you meet could be a curriculum for you if you perceive with sufficient perspective" (p. 8). Several areas of curriculum scholarship that pertain to the ideas of "unintended," "hidden," and "null" curriculums (Apple & King, 1977, p. 347; Eisner, 2002, p. 98; Jackson, 1992, pp. 8-9) all attest to the powerful, personal journeys and stories

our educational systems (aided by our *unconscious* complicity) seem compelled to omit, neglect, medicate, teach, plan, policy make and shape around (under, behind) in order to protect the system itself from uncertainty and the potential chaos and complication of change.

It would be all-too-easy at this point, as well as yet another example of how hard it is to be conscious of, and work beyond, the legacies of a simplified Cartesian way of thinking, to say, "Okay, Sulya's work suggests we place more value on the unknown and it may have a *point*" and then assimilate it, not through an embrace of the deeper call (in rich, burdensome complicity, all-the-time, everyday) to examine the fundamental values and divisions within our systems of education with a view toward nurturing a more holistic, ignorance-based perspective to live alongside our other perspectives, but through a more specific and narrow return to the example of essay questions. We could turn my fairly brief exploration of the role of the question within an essay into new assessment strategies based upon a careful 'Taxonomy of Questions' whereby the system is tasked to create and enforce standards that help distinguish between a 'superficial' question and a 'penetrating' one, add this to the rubrics for writing essays, allot grade points to it and move along from there.

In fact, three years ago, in my very first masters' class, that is exactly the idea I came up with. And, who knows? Perhaps it has merit as one more tool to try if only to see what it might serve to open up, change or lead to. I would hazard to guess it would mean some students might do a little better on their essays and some might do a little worse but, more importantly, it's a tool (one

more "instrument" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71)), and *not* a true philosophical shift in our underpinnings that might allow us to be more open to the whole idea of "right view" (p. 71); to de-center some of our knowledge dominance and embrace an IBW. We could add an allotment of grade points to the formulating of questions to all our rubrics and curricula, but those curricula would still exist within a system that denies us our fundamental interbeing (elder in the child, child in the elder etc. (Jardine, 2000, p. 50)), pits us against one another (teachers against parents, parents against teachers etc.) and fails to honour "lives in the making" to privilege "compliance, silence and test scores" and instead "press down on the lives and dreams" of all who are involved. (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 229).

It should not be our burden to negotiate these boundaries. It should not be our burden to feel ourselves entrenched in positions, calling out the 'other' in every situation with our accusations of a damaging ignorance as deficit, our double projected certainties. In the embrace of an IBW, it is beautiful burden enough to face our ignorance with humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion and to honour complexity and diversity of perspective and experience with a *conscious and responsible complicity*.

To Broaden Our Definition of Education

Another interesting effect of the compartmentalization of formal education systems is that they tend to hijack the whole idea of education into being something that only happens in school. In the pre-show to a movie at West

Edmonton Mall, I once saw a series of quick cut, 'man-on-the-street' interviews

with what looked like eight-ten year-olds being asked what was their favourite

part of school. Their answer was almost unanimously 'recess.' Further

reinforcement of this idea that one of the best parts of traditional school is *leaving*

it, is the fact that undesirable or transgressive behaviour in schools is still fairly

commonly punished by 'detention' whereby punishment is *more time in school*.

To tie it all together and in other words, it's hard not to assume that if education

only happens in school and school is not a place you want to be then learning and

education must also be undesirable in and of themselves. Prolonged exposure to

traditional school systems appears to vilify not only school but learning itself, so

this next thing I will propose is kind of jammed before the hinges even begin to

squeak, but I'll say it anyway because, despite the somewhat desolate quality

evoked by squeaky hinge imagery, I know that I am not alone when I say it: The

whole of Life (capitalized on purpose) is fundamentally pedagogical (John Dewey

in Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 220).

Beginning from the moment we are born, everything and everyone in our

environments is teaching us who and how and where we are; where we are

relative to our ecology, to other people, to history and to our futures. Some

people, I imagine, on scientific and/or spiritual grounds might even argue that this

education begins *before* we are born and in our current digital information surge,

our 'environments' can no longer be defined simply by the immediate, physicality

of our location in a particular place, with particular people. The environments

with which we interact, to which we contribute and which educate, inform and

create us now extend through inter-continental cables under oceans, via waves beamed to satellites and back to earth. They make us at least somewhat aware of peoples and environments far away and vastly different than our own and in ways that make us very intimate with back-lit screens and keyboards like the one I am using right now. Every interaction with every website or electronic device; every footstep made on dirt, grass or pavement; every touch we do or do not receive from family or friends; every harsh word or kindness; every shape, texture, quality of light we experience teaches us something. Some of it will be more lasting and vital or damaging than other parts of it but education is everything we do *whether we know it's happening or not*, and I think that if it's going to happen anyway, we have an obligation and responsibility – relative to a deepened and reconfigured relationship to complicity – to be aware of it.

Life as Education: My Son & Minecraft

In Grade One my son decided he hated math. The reasons for this hatred seemed to have to do with his peers being better at it then he was. He couldn't do it and so he hated it. At the time he often played, and continues to play at the time of this writing, an online game called Minecraft. It's a building game. You work with blocks – almost everything is cube shaped – and elements such as wood, stone, lava, diamond, gold, water etc.. You build things and burn them down if you like. Spawn animals from eggs. Fight things if you like. But, mostly it's about the building and he has made some incredibly spectacular things: sculptures of people, three story houses with balconies and plants, shops big

enough to be department stores with interesting shapes, structure and inventory, whole towns etc.. There are special ways to build certain things out of specific combinations and structures of elements. He looks up how to do it on YouTube. They are formulas, if you will, that ultimately require a lot of set theory, counting and a ready spatial awareness. So, when he came home and said he hated math, I told him that, that was impossible.

I told him he LOVED math.

He denied it.

I explained that if he hated math he wouldn't love Minecraft. He insisted that Minecraft has nothing to do with math and I propose that he struggles with the idea that Minecraft is full of math because 'Math' is a distinct subject in school, school is – by definition – not regular life and not pleasant, and Minecraft is *fun*.

Minecraft is something he does at home with no bells or teachers to structure his relationship to it. There is the occasional sharing with peers in the form of local friends who also enjoy Minecraft, or people he has come to know through watching their YouTube channels about Minecraft and neither parent in either of his homes allow him to play it all the time. But, largely, he assimilates it as his independence *from* 'learning' (i.e. 'school') and he frequently says, "I wish the whole world were Minecraft so I could make whatever I want." I point out that there would be no circles or soft shapes of any kind if the whole world were Minecraft. I tell him I understand how cool it would be but I would miss round

things, soft things.   And he just tells me, still insisting that he is not doing math, that you can, in fact, make soft shapes out of cubes…

> The child who recites under the threat of the rod obeys the rod and that's
> all: he will apply his intelligence to something else. But the child who is
> *explained to* will devote his intelligence to the work of grieving: to
> understanding, that is to say, to understanding that he doesn't understand
> unless he is explained to. He is no longer submitting to the rod, but rather
> to a hierarchical world of intelligence. (Rancière, 1991, p. 8)

In the world where math is "explained" (p. 8) to him (school), my son feels alienated and at a disadvantage. In the part of his life where he readily applies "his intelligence to something else" (p. 8) (in this case Minecraft) he engages with, and understands, math in a very embodied and interesting way. Formal education has, in much of the world, forsaken the rod, as such, but we still do an awful lot of *explaining*. We define what math is in a particular way – or set of ways given there have been a lot of recent and exciting changes in the Alberta Math curricula in particular – but no matter these changes, my son still appears to view 'Math' as a neatly compartmentalized subject in school and holds it separate and apart from the learning and math he does in Minecraft.

His earlier hatred of math could well have been defined as his feeling that he cannot learn it as well as his friends – his learned sense of his own incapability (p. 8) and so, as a result, he readily "applies his intelligence to something else" (p. 8), but I want my son to understand that every time he plays Minecraft he is learning. I want him to know that Minecraft – even though he finds it entirely

engrossing and inspiring – _is_ a type of 'school.' So are the YouTube videos. So is brushing his teeth and remembering to wash the spit down out of respect for me and/or anyone else who might use the sink. I am also aware that some of the ingredients in the toothpaste he uses might not be great for the waterways into which he winds up washing it and might yet make him aware of that too…

I do not say any of these things facetiously. I am in earnest. To point out the pedagogy of day-to-day life is not to diminish the importance of formal schooling nor that of professional teachers. It is, however, an effort to complicate the hierarchical component of how we define 'importance' so that there can possibly be a plurality of definitions of 'school' and of 'teacher' without diminishment of the value of any of them. We are so conditioned to think that value is relative and power-based, and not _situational_ and _personal_ that this is difficult – even for me – which is why I worry terribly about offending service teachers and/or school administrators... But, once again, I am trying to practice what I preach and that means I must – in my beautiful and burdensome complicity – be able to hold my discomfort, the complexity of these questions and ideas, my consideration of others and compassion all at the same time… I must be mindful that my fears do not stop me from saying what seems as though it could be valuable and right to say and I must be mindful that in saying what I feel may be valuable and right that I do not do harm to people I value… This very self-negotiation is its own type of pedagogy that I feel is commensurate with an IBW wherein my ideas, my relationships and my complicity are all my teachers.

Life as Education: Shopping Malls, Buildings that Bend, to Bow or Shake Hands, Money & More

In my first masters course, as another example of a plural way in which to view 'teacher,' 'school,' and 'education,' our professor, David Smith (2010), gave us an ungraded assignment, that we were to carry out with him, and together as a class, to go to a local mall in Edmonton, Alberta and *read it*. The actual assignment was called "Learning to 'Read' a Shopping Mall" and had a worksheet requiring us to engage this reading through different theoretical lenses. For a "phenomenological reality" we were to "walk around the mall for five minutes, find a seat somewhere, then simply describe how you experience the mall. Don't interpret your feelings, sensations, etc. – simply describe them." For a "semiotic reality" we were told to "Identify three objects in the mall" and ask ourselves "'What has to be happening 'off-stage' for this object to be meaningful?'" To engage with various other realities, we were also asked to think about what needs to be "repressed for this shopping mall to be 'loved?';" to pick a store and find out where their products are made and ask a clerk, if we felt we could, how much the mark-up on some of the items in the store is; and to give some thought to who is made "Other" by the mall (Smith, 2010).

My fellow classmates and I undertook these tasks faithfully and – for my part at least – with great pleasure ending up at one big table in the food court to discuss our findings. We had all noticed different things, experienced a reading of the mall through different theoretical lenses and also through the filter of our own personal lenses and experience, beliefs and agendas. We had noticed many

similar things as well and to end in community around that table to discuss it all feels as though it was an important part of the lesson. One of us stayed afterwards to buy shoes, which, after 'reading' the mall, felt… different to me than it might have otherwise. It felt as though his choice to make a purchase was heightened by our greater awareness of the biases and purposes of the mall. There was, in short, no way to avoid an awareness of his – or our – complicity with, and in, the mall.

I don't remember if anyone ever said out loud that just the *existence* of shopping malls such as the one we were in is, itself, a form of education that we take for granted, the result of a history that I would expect included markets and bartering. I have, several times now, found myself talking to children about money and products and the children with whom I have had the pleasure of speaking have all – to a one – been absolutely shocked by the idea that there have been times and cultures in human history where human beings didn't use money. Just the existence of money teaches us things about our purpose and place in the world, different things than we might learn in a system of barter and/or a system where individuals make many of their goods and grow much of their own food. There is a proverb that is most often attributed to the Cree, that says, "Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned, only after the last fish has been caught, only then will you find that money cannot be eaten." I have shared this with my son several times recently, but it's a hard sell (forgive the pun) because it works against a daily education relative to the uses and purpose of money that make it hard to understand.

We are also taught things by the shapes of our clothes and buildings and by how we sit and greet each other. ani difranco has written at least two songs with lyrics that speak to this, saying in one:

'cause some guy designed

these shoes I use to walk around,

some big man's business turns a profit

every time I lay my money down.

some guy designed the room I'm standing in

another built it with his own tools

who says I like right angles?

these are not my laws.

there are not my rules. (difranco, 1992)

and in the other:

buildings and bridges

are made to bend in the wind

to withstand the world,

that's what it takes.

all that steel and stone

is no match for the air, my friend

what doesn't bend breaks

what doesn't bend breaks. (difranco, 1994)

The offer of both of these metaphors in these two different songs, shows us what it means to be consciously complicit, to question and to learn from the right

angles of our walls, from the wisdom of our architects who understand that "what doesn't bend breaks" (difranco, 1994) and to recognize that many of the rules we live by we had no hand in making but we frequently honour them all-the-same.

To bow to someone, as they do in Japan, to take another example, teaches a certain set of unspoken things about personal space, a North American handshake teaches another. To grow up in Hungary speaking Hungarian where, I was once told by a very young and handsome Hungarian man, there is no gender to any of their pronouns or nouns, teaches one relationship to the sexes. Whereas, to grow up with any Latin language, where all pronouns and nouns are gendered, teaches another. We are always learning things and, as the mall assignment (Smith, 2010) emphasized, sometimes people are teaching those things to us on purpose to make money and probably hope that we don't notice the artfulness of, or motivations for, their 'lessons;'" hope we don't ever think closely enough about any of it to figure out that there are alternatives to what they offer.

> We look across the perfectly lined and spaced products in any suburban
> grocery store, angled slightly to highlight their curled and bolded logos
> and glowing palely under fine-tuned florescent lights – and we learn the
> aesthetics of pop-glitz and oversaturated colors, all bounded within
> staccato linearity, Warhol's critique turned into its object. In a museum of
> natural history, we slowly amble down designated paths from entrance to
> exit, marveling at the narrative of human evolution – from primal, savage,
> and dark body to an efficacious, civil, clean white one. Walking down
> public streets, we are taught where we can and cannot be, our teacher

often the baleful gaze of the police. In the guerilla gardens of Detroit, Los

Angeles, and London, we learn to reclaim post-urban spaces as sites of

production and community support, the crops a small, defiant green

beacon that refutes suffocation by the labyrinth of dull grey (Sandlin,

Schultz, & Burdick, 2010, p. 1)

In an echo of ani difranco (1994; 1992) Sandlin, Schultz and Burdick (2010)

elegantly exemplify how frequently taken-for-granted environments, such as

grocery stores and city streets (p. 1), act as both teachers and sources of

knowledge about, and within, a given culture. They show us that 'learning' does

not just happen in school and on purpose and that not all of our 'teachers' are

equally noble in their attempts to educate us.

Whereas, in the case of various types of overt political propaganda, the

'teachers' may well wish to start a revolution or a war and may or may not care if

you know who they are and why they are teaching what they are teaching. Still

other times, we learn rudimentary and important things about power and respect

simply by being told, "listen to your teacher and do what s/he says." So, is this a

bad thing for a parent to tell their child on a first day of Kindergarten? It's

complicated. It's never bad to encourage people to listen, I don't think, or to be

respectful, but does this particular directive unconsciously, in the guise of 'good

behaviour' and 'politeness,' teach our children that school is a place where we

must always do what we are told? Where authority figures should be respected

simply for being authority figures?

Life as Education: Of Chocolate Bars, Standing Up & a Lack of Humility

I didn't go to Kindergarten. My parents were my first official teachers and the first thing they taught me was to wonder, question and think about everything. Come back with me, for example, to Montréal in the very early 1980s. The checkout at Steinberg's grocery store in Alexis Nihon Plaza at the corner of Rue Atwater and Rue Saint-Catherine. Weight shifting from foot to foot, Mom's hand anticipates the purchase inside her purse, but our food isn't even on the belt yet. We're waiting to watch our food be arranged into heavy brown paper bags each emblazoned with a deep red 'S' in a boxy, minimalist font.

Once full, the bags will be stacked carefully (or not-so-carefully as a bag of mangled tomatoes will tell us when we get home) into my Mom's mesh wire tilt-cart to wheel the relatively short walk home. While we wait, my smallness is restless in the looming shadow of a display containing row upon row of chocolate bars and gum and candies.

"Mommy," I work up the nerve to ask, "can I have a chocolate bar?"

The answer on some shopping trips: "Sure, baby, pick one."

My eyes confront the rows of bright reds and mustardy screaming yellows; the matte packages and the shiny ones. My mouth knows the taste of some of what I see: crisp, sweet KitKats, smooth, salty-sweet Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. My sister loves Coffee Crisps. I love my sister. Mommy loves Eatmores, but only when they're fresh. Daddy will eat pretty much anything in little bits at a time if it's around. But I have to choose because it's almost our turn to pay and it's my treat, not my sister's, my mother's or my father's. Our stuff is

being bagged already. Mr. Big, O'Henry, Aero with the bubbles, especially the green minty bubbles…

Some trips I do not choose fast enough and our purchase is made before I add my treat to the pile. Sometimes my mouth knows exactly what it wants and it's on the belt moments after my mom gives me the green light. Always, though, it is my choice and years later I am told that this was always, every time it happened, a deliberate part of my education – an education that was not taking place in a formal school but at home with my parents as my teachers.

She would never choose for me. Never just pick something and buy it for me.

The desire was mine and so must the choice be.

Thus, occasionally being overwhelmed by my choices was a side-effect of my privilege and of my desire. The other times, knowing what I wanted was the by-product of real consideration of all the variables, a burgeoning – if limited – criticality and self-awareness.

It was an important lesson if for no other reason then it taught me something very different than, "Listen to your teacher and do what s/he says." When my substitute drama teacher, in Grade Nine, put me on stage in a spotlight and asked me if I had any friends in front of all my peers – right after he had put another girl in the same chair, placed a large drum over her head, and banged it when he didn't like her answers to his questions – I tried to get him fired. I failed. But, I felt I had the right to try and I did try because his behaviour was miseducative, disrespectful and unacceptable. Except on exams, I rarely – if ever

– wrote the assigned essay topic in any of my undergraduate university classes. I brought in authors from outside the stated syllabus and reading lists, I sometimes wrote fiction pieces with lengthy 'works cited' instead of essays. I always *asked* if I could do these things, because I did respect the power relationships sufficiently to know that I was the student and the professors were in charge, but I felt it was my *right* to ask to do these things and that the professors should have good reasons if they wanted to say no, that they would – at the very least – owe me a conversation about their rejection of my requests.

By being forced to choose my own chocolate bar I was empowered and burdened with knowledge that I am of the world and must take responsibility to and for my relationships and decisions within it. It doesn't matter, either, that sometimes I want nothing more than to offload the responsibility inherent to this interconnection and interbeing, forget about it, quietly go numb and slip more deeply into an individualistic stance. I learned that I cannot either allow others to choose everything for me with well-directed "fluorescent lights" (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010, p. 1) or ignore others to pursue only my own interests. I have come to understand and accept that I am complicit in all that I encounter and enact.

I am complicit in my Education.

In this light, I feel compelled to ask myself: Do all of these acts in which I engaged – trying to get a teacher fired, never accepting the wisdom of my elders in the form of assignments or reading lists – lack a degree of humility?

Absolutely.

Does it lack curiosity or creativity? In some ways, yes. Does it test the

limits of my compassion at times? Absolutely and especially before I started to

meditate more consciously and openly on the importance of humility. But,

ultimately, all of this predisposed me to be very open to, and engaged by, an

assignment to read a shopping mall and to see that my son is doing math when he

plays Minecraft. My early experiences have also helped me wind my way

through the years to this proposal to de-center an observed societal tendency to

privilege compartmentalized and binary epistemologies in order to embrace a

more holistic effort to privilege ignorance in the forms of humility, curiosity,

creativity and compassion. I don't, as I've already said, think this embrace can or

even should, happen in some sweeping way that *supplants* 'knowledge,' but I also

don't think it can ever happen if we do not first recognize that education is

everything we do. Ultimately, our formal systems of education, which includes

educational researchers such as myself, will never be as successful as they can be

until we build them alongside each other, for each other – *for* and *with* each

unique individual who exists within them.

Educators are interested in life. Life, to borrow John Dewey's metaphor,

is education. Educators are interested in learning and teaching and how it

takes place; they are interested in the leading out of different lives, the

values, attitudes, beliefs, social systems, institutions and structures, and

how they are all linked to learning and teaching. Educational researchers

are, first, educators, and we too are interested in people. Educational

researchers, with their interest in people, are no different in that sense than

anyone pursuing research in the social sciences. These are the sciences of people. People's lives and how they are composed and lived out are what is of interest. We social scientists are gossips on a grand scale, interested in observing, participating with, thinking about, saying and writing the doings and goings-on of our fellow humans (…). But if our interest as researchers is lived experience – that is, lives and how they are lived – how did our research conversations become focused on the measurement of student responses? How did educational experience come to be seen as something that could be measured in this way? (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii)

And Now Back to the Word(s): Education, Educator, Educate

I have, in company with John Dewey (John Dewey in Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 220), defined Life as Education and spent many pages and words in exemplars and conversation about this idea. It seems, now, that in order to complicate and enrich this idea still further; to add layers and possibilities for still more meaning to emerge, there is real value in a return – as I have already done with the word 'ignorance' and with 'complicity' – to the definitions and history of the words 'education', 'educator', and 'educate'.

The current definition of the word 'education' is as follows:

education: noun [mass noun]

1. the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university: a course of education.

- the theory and practice of teaching: colleges of education.

- [count noun] a body of knowledge acquired while being educated: his education is encyclopedic and eclectic.

- information about or training in a particular subject: health education.

2. (an education) an enlightening experience: *Petrus is a good workman— it is an education to watch him.* (education, 2010)

It is not a particularly surprising definition relative to the discussion thus far. It does not foreclose on the idea of Life being its own pedagogy, but it certainly places an emphasis on education that takes place in institutions such as schools, colleges or even teacher education programs. It uses language that evokes the idea of knowledge accumulation with the use of words like "encyclopedic," "giving," and "receiving" (education, 2010). The example of the man, "Petrus" (education, 2010) speaks to the idea of an observational, non-institutional, 'life' education but – overall – I am left with the impression of education as formal instruction for the purposes of knowledge accumulation.

The definition of 'educator' is similarly predictable: "**educator**: noun a person who provides instruction or education; a teacher: the perspective of a professional educator" (educator, 2010). No where in this definition, and once again I mean absolutely no disrespect to professional teachers or teaching when I say this now or when I spoke of it before, is there room for the idea that the shape of my walls, the make of my shoes (difranco, 1992), the way I bring food into my home or video games like Minecraft are *also* teachers… That the people who

plan where to put which items in my local grocery store do not *wish* for me to see them as teachers (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010, p. 1) or, more accurately – and again with no wish to offend or belittle the profession of teaching itself – as people with *educational agendas*. So, again, I find myself primed to reach back into history, to etymology, when and where the definition of 'education' suggests a turn to the word 'educate' so I will list both:

> **education:** noun. 1530s, "childrearing," also "the training of animals," from Middle French *education* (14c.) and directly from Latin *educationem* (nominative *educatio*), from past participle stem of *educare* (see *educate*). Originally of education in social codes and manners; meaning "systematic schooling and training for work" is from 1610s. (education, 2001-2013)

and

> **educate**: verb. mid-15c., "bring up (children), train," from Latin *educatus*, past participle of *educare* "bring up, rear, educate," which is related to *educere* "bring out, lead forth," from ex- "out" (see *ex-*) + *ducere* "to lead" (see duke (n.)). Meaning "provide schooling" is first attested 1580s. (educate, 2001-2013)

Now we have a great deal more to work with. It would seem that education was far more synonymous with "childrearing" (education, 2001-2013) (an act we are more likely to assign to parents at this point in history than to teachers) until 1610, in the period just before René Descartes (1960) wrote *Discourse on Method* in 1637. It was a time when he, himself had – notably – decided to take his education into his own hands. He writes:

I should first attempt to establish philosophic principles, and … since this

was the most important thing in the world and the place where

precipitation and prejudgment were most to be feared, I should not attempt

to reach conclusions until I had attained a much more mature age than my

then twenty-three years, and had spent much time in preparing for it. This

preparation would consist partly in freeing my mind from the false

opinions which I had previously acquired, partly in building up a fund of

experiences which should serve afterwards as the raw material of my

reasoning, and partly in training myself in the method which I had

determined upon, so that I should become more and more adept in its use.

(pp. 17-18)

One can intuit in the juxtaposition of the temporal shifts in the definition of the

word 'education' and the type and tone of the determinations, ideas and self-

facing Descartes had fixed upon for himself, that there may well have been a

critical mass building in the early to mid 1600s for what we now, by the strange

selective process of history, often call 'Cartesian' thinking. Obviously, Descartes,

himself, did not change the definition of 'education' but *Discourse on Method*,

does contribute greatly to the ease with which a shift in definition from the

intimacies of "childrearing" (education, 2001-2013) to the cooler more clinical

nature of "systematic schooling and training for work" (education, 2001-2013)

can become so entrenched and comfortable that it has remained the dominant

definition for just over 400 years.

The most interesting part of the etymology of the word 'educate' for me, though, is the root that means to "bring out, lead forth" (educate, 2001-2013). Like the history of the word 'complicity' and the roots it has in the idea of "folding together" (complicity, 2010) there is, I think, something truly beautiful here. To "bring out" and "lead forth" (educate, 2001-2013) suggests invitation and seems to gesture outwards. The word 'lead' is present, but not in its most hierarchical sense, I don't think. I feel 'lead' here connotes guidance not command. The word 'forth,' in its turn, does not imply that the student is behind the teacher being lead as a guide does not *have* to pave the way or make the rules; a guide can point out a possible path, advise or be a source of information when needed, when invited. In this interpretation, to "bring out" and "lead forth" (educate, 2001-2013) as a way to describe education suggests the image, to me at least, of the teacher on the threshold between a secure and comforting space and the vast unknowns of the world – the shear impressive, inspiring, frightening, beautiful, daunting power of ignorance. From this threshold, this teacher (guide) invites the students to exit the secure space and enter this vast, multifaceted ignorance at their own pace, in their own way. Dwayne Huebner (2008) writes:

> We do not need "learning theory" or "developmental theory" to explain human change. We need them to explain our fixations and neuroses, our limits, whether imposed by self or others. The question that educators need to ask is not how people learn and develop, but what gets in the way of the great journey – the journey of the self or soul. Education is a way of attending to and caring for that journey. (p. 405)

And moves us from education as "systematic training for school or work" (educate, 2001-2013) full of theory and implied methods neatly compartmentalized, toward something open, personal and unpredictable with no surrender of the community and interconnection of the relationship between the guide and the guided that lives in the image of being invited to explore a broad unknown world with someone there, not to tell you what subjects to study or how to study them but to be there when and if you need them. Somewhere in this integration of a *bringing out* with a *leading forth* (educate, 2001-2013) and an idea of *getting out of the way* of a "journey of the self or soul" (Huebner, 2008, p. 405) attended to and cared for by a community of guides – who may well be elders and/or professional teachers but might also be colleagues, brothers, sons, daughters, sisters, peers or friends as well as other animals, or come in the less obvious form of a YouTube video, a shopping mall or an unquestioned right angle in architecture – could possibly be a definition of education on its way to the humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion required of us by an IBW.

It is interesting to add, at this point, that the etymology of the word "educator" is defined this way: "**educator**: noun. 1560s, "one who nourishes or rears;" 1670s, "one who trains or instructs," from Latin educator (in classical Latin, "a foster father" as well as "a tutor"), …. Latin *educatrix* meant "a nurse"'" (educator, 2001-2013) whereby we are offered the idea of 'nourishment' as a new gift to the growing poem I've been weaving about education and teachers in a way-of-being that finds strength, purpose and beauty in a non-dualistic approach to ignorance *as well as* knowledge. We also see – even more clearly than with the

etymology of the word education – that these roots of nourishment and child-

rearing (educator, 2001-2013), have turned instead toward the language of

"training" and "instruction" – the language of all the "Old Masters" (Rancière,

1991, p. 21) – less than three decades after Descartes published *Discourse on*

Method. I wonder, again, at the connections, the critical mass for ideas of

systematic control, order and certainty in the early 1600s into which *Discourse on*

Method was placed and how in its time – and over time – it was taken up and used

relative to Descartes' intentions. I wonder, too, when I reread the citation above

about his goals and plans for himself and his journey, if it was not itself ripe with

nourishment?

In the Light of All This: Some Emergent/Lingering Wonders & Thoughts

To view an educator as one who "nourishes" (educator, 2001-2013) is a

powerful vision, I think. It conjures other words like 'sustenance' and

'sustaining,' 'flourish,' 'sprout,' and 'thrive.' Words with fecundity which also

feel commensurate with a pedagogical practice of ignorance. This fecundity

grows in me a bursting crop of questions. In relation to the proposal, at the heart

of this work, for an embrace of the more holistic epistemology and ontology that

resides within an IBW where ignorance is characterized by humility, curiosity,

creativity, compassion and the exquisite burden of a deeply conscious complicity,

I wonder:

- How do we bring our education systems back to us, so that they no longer

    present the illusion that they have a life of their own (Jackson, 1992, p. 8),

so that they are put back into relation with all the people and life that makes up their earthy, grounded, interconnected and complex reality?

- How do we remind ourselves that our education systems exist as they do because we have made them, and permit them to stay, that way? Because we have entrenched, frequently unquestioned personal investments in their continuation as-is, even as we find ourselves in constant negotiation of their boundaries and often bend their rules (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 172; Jackson, 1992, p. 8)?

- How do we begin to acknowledge that we have grown so used to working 'around' our systems of education – to bending the rules in order to live and act well within them – (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 172; Jackson, 1992, p. 8) that we forget more and more that to bend the rules and negotiate boundaries are not the same as genuine change?

- How do we enact an education for prospective educators (pre-service teachers) which invites and models "nourishment" (educator, 2001-2013) and fecundity as a way to "reintroduce the integrity of the world" (Smith, 1999, p. 46)? Where the idea that we are taught not only by people in a profession of teaching, but through conscious, complicit involvement with the shape of our walls, and how we greet each other, can be a grounded source of "nourishment" (educator, 2001-2013)? Where this idea is never a challenge or offence to the role of 'teacher' but another "instrument" to consider on a path toward "right view" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 71)?

- How do we remember the fundamental nature of interbeing as it is reflected in the idea that the elder is always visible in the child (Jardine, 2000, p. 50), the teacher in the student, administrator in the teacher etc. and visa versa, so that we can break down some of the walls between groups, live and work together with less finger pointing and fewer double projected certainties; fewer accusations of ignorance as damaging deficit?

- How do we build curricula around the messy, complicated interests, experience and "lives in the making" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 229) of *all* the people who live formal education day-by-day in a way that does not surrender all the *good* Descartes left in his wake?

They are all big, difficult questions and, as promised at the outset of this writing, I have no ready answers. My mind turns, though, back to my son and to Minecraft. My son lives in an interested an intense pedagogical relationship to Minecraft. It was introduced to him by one of his former step-brothers and has gone on to be something he shared extensively with both his former step-brothers, that he shares with friends, with his father in online server environment called "Cubeville," more recently, at the time of this writing, with me in a version for iphone and ipod touch and with the vast network of Minecrafters online to whom he turns for entertainment and advice, inspiration and camaraderie in his enjoyment of, and growth with, the game.

With his friends who are less experienced with Minecraft, he himself gets to be the guide, the one who brings people out and leads them forth (educate, 2001-2013), just as he turns to guides, of various kinds, himself when he needs

advice or support. It's a responsibility he wears with more compassion and patience on some days than on others and that struggle, too, as I live alongside him becomes a tool to share in a path toward a healthier relationship to humility as well as compassion. Given the game is something he himself enjoys and has chosen to play, that no one has *gotten in his way* (Huebner, 2008, p. 405) of playing it, and given the game is itself a very creative and versatile tool, it is not hard to identify his growth in curiosity and creativity as well – thereby making his relationship to Minecraft a wonderful example of the potential benefits of an IBW in a self-directed educational context.

It is an educational space where the ideas of teacher and student are intertwined, where he has agency and where the game itself is a vehicle for learning about everything from mathematics to patience. It inspires the making of three-dimensional papercraft toys (in the 'real' world), carefully designed and coloured (to stay in keeping with the cubes of Minecraft) cardboard swords and shields; it has inspired whole worlds made out of Lego and characters and vegetation built and glued together out of wooden building blocks; he has memorized the lyrics to many Minecraft mash-up songs and videos, along with dance moves and explored the software necessary to possibly animate his own Minecraft videos; he has worked steadily closer to an ability to draw three dimensional shapes by hand; has learned to use a fairly complex gradient tool and to draw his own Minecraft pictures in Adobe Illustrator, a vector based graphic design program on the computer that I didn't even try to use until I was in my

early 20s; and has even found himself learning about cooking when a blogger who videoblogs about Minecraft turned out to also have a blog about cooking…

It is hard to imagine that our mainstream systems of education could find a way to honour this type pedagogical experience with each student, every day in every school and classroom – at every level of schooling including the one for which this thesis is being written. Pedagogical thinking, in general, tends more toward a working out of how to most effectively and, in more and more cases, most *fairly* deliver curriculum in a way that will be engaging and not how to engage our teaching through the living curricula brought into every classroom by each and every student. It feels like it would be a lot of work, doesn't it? On top of all the immense amount of work already carried out by teachers and professor/researchers? To have to know the interests and worlds of every student and to build skills-development and curricular goals into those interests and worlds would be a huge task. It might, however, reduce the need to try to make curriculum 'interesting,' though, as the student is already interested. It might also allow for the possibility of individual students, perhaps with the help of a community of parents, to create their own lesson plans to teach the class – even at an elementary level – so that a teacher is not required to plan all the lessons his/herself. It might change the nature of assessment as well, to include more peer and self-assessment, also possibly reducing teacher workloads in interesting ways…

It is a powerful habit of mind to assume that any change, no less an embrace of an IBW attended to by this kind of fundamental shift in the definitions

and practice of teaching and learning, winds up being 'just another task on the list' for teachers. It is another powerful habit of mind to see places and spaces where some of these ideas are already at play and tell ourselves that *that wouldn't work here* without even trying… So accustomed are we to changes in procedure and technique, new subject matter and methods, it is truly hard to imagine that whole systems can and do *change* even though it is this exact kind of real change which brought us the still unfolding good and bad – the complication, contradiction, hopefulness, arrogance, humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion – of René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and 'Cartesianism'.

The key here ("keys" differing form "points" in the crucial way that they unlock things like dark rooms wherein there might be black cats (Firestein, 2012, p. 2)) is to have the humility, curiosity, creativity and compassion to be able to see the difference between change in method/technique/subject matter and *real change*, to forgive ourselves and each other for not having seen it before, and to accept and enact a conscious (burdensome, beautiful) complicity as we make and shape the world so that the change can be deeply felt but still supple, responsive and humble enough to change again when needed.

Education and schools are everywhere.

Teachers are everywhere.

For all of us. Worthy of consideration, this may be a beautiful truth "synonymous with the courage derived from the habit of not running a con game on the unique and specific temper of one's own mind" (Lapham, 2008, p. 19) with

a freedom derived from "learning to trust [our] own thought, possess [our] own history, speak in [our] own voices" (p. 19)

> It doesn't matter how or when the mind achieves the spark of ignition – in an old book or a new video game, from a teacher encountered by accident in graduate or grammar school, in the course of dissecting a frog or pruning an apple tree, while looking at a painting by Jan Vermeer or listening to the Beatles sing "A Hard Day's Night." (p. 19).

BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION (FOR SOMETHING THAT CANNOT EVER
BE FINISHED)

> If we are responsible for a world we have not made, if we have the strange
> work of trying to understand the minds of others and still keep our own
> mind, if we have the work of welcoming what cannot be understood and
> the responsibility for a hospitality without reserve, if we confront a world
> that is wearing out, if we must work from all this ignorance, we may then
> begin our teacher education. It will be a teacher education as an
> unfinished project, more fragile than we ever imagined, now lost and
> found at the point where our fact of dependency develops within the
> promise of responsibility. (Britzman, 2007, pp. 11-12)

First encountered in Fall Semester of 2011 while drinking coffee in a Starbucks,
the above citation made me cry. It is the last passage in the article, the whole of
which is a journey in and of itself, and these last lines felt like home. Given a life
with several moves (within cities, intercity, cross-country, intercontinental) my
definition of 'home' has had to loosen and shift over the years to enable any sense
of 'home' at all. A while ago now it shifted enough that home can be found in a
few beautiful lines of writing, in the smile that accompanies a friend's laugh. I
am grateful for this. So grateful, because it is possible to see the whole journey of
my masters program and the writing of this thesis in just the one quote cited
above.

The passage contains within it a necessarily unknowable future; an attention to the difficulty of attending to one's "journey of the self or soul" (Huebner, 2008, p. 405) without ever losing sight of community; the humility intrinsic to generous compassionate care of others; vulnerability, the fact of entropy, the transience and "tentative" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 223) nature of knowing and of ignorance; and, the hopeful connection between the fact of our interconnection and interbeing, our exquisite burdens of complicity, with a "promise of responsibility" (Britzman, 2007, pp. 11-12). Britzman writes of "teacher education" (p. 12) but her words can be spoken about any form of education as it exists in every facet of our lives and still hold their truth, their value. I urge you, in fact, to go and read the citation again and leave out the word "teacher" this time, just to feel the difference.

Like this thesis, though, I feel that the overall tone of Britzman's (2007) words is heavy. The lighter work of curiosity and creativity, for example, are in there – necessary for confronting, and contending with, an unknowable future and a world that is "wearing out" (p. 11) – but the Life of curiosity and creativity, their joyful and generous nature, are not as readily apparent. This is a concern. I worry that in this attempt to weave together some of the last three (30 some-odd?) years of my journey into a multi-faceted, deliberately recursive, at times poetic, at times (I suspect) badgering look at the possibility of a turn toward ignorance as a dominant epistemology and possible ontology, that I have erred too much on 'heavy'.

In an effort to keep myself accountable, however, and to look past the surface (Smith, 1999, p. 46) of my own immediate responses, I wonder if this feeling that heaviness should be avoided is just part of a broader cultural habit to avoid suffering, to foreground *happy*. It is easier and easier to see and understand, in a more embodied way every day, that suffering and happiness inter-are (Nhat Hanh, 2012, pp. 28-29). Like knowledge and ignorance, to studiously, obsessively privilege one is to lose them both (Quinn, 2011, p. 33). Deep learning necessitates a 'letting go,' letting go entails loss and loss engenders suffering: "[to give] up a part of one's self or past, entails grief work, and requires a community of life wherein one can die and know that life will not be lost, but found" (Huebner, 2008, p. 410).

There is liberation in this death and rebirth and the tools with which we best approach the attendant, unavoidable, suffering may well be "compassion and love" born of "understanding" (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 28) because "the art of creating happiness and the art of handling suffering are the same thing" (p. 31). I cannot, in other words, call for us to surrender such integral habits of mind and action, shaped in part – at least – over these last 400 hundred years by specific interpretations and uses of René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and all resultant forms of 'Cartesianism,' and expect that it's going to look, sound or be *easy* or without difficulty… without suffering or heaviness. I can, however, hope that if my suggested experiment to embrace an IBW is at least considered (played with, thought about, bandied about, attempted even in little ways) that there might be compensatory joys and freedoms. We might come home to each other, for

example, and to the planet itself as something vast and beautiful to which we are indelibly bound. We might uncover a promise that no matter how small, if an embrace of ignorance is attempted openly, imaginatively, that – moment by moment, person by person, family by family, community by community, system by system – we will always be able to rely on each other and the world, on our ever-present "community of life" (Huebner, 2008, p. 410) to see us through because an embrace of an IBW will help us to de-center the separations, duality, and compartmentalization of our knowledge dominance and bring us home to that community.

This is what motivates me to continue with these ideas. To work with and from a place of ignorance as it is uncovered in this thesis requires – and has required (and will require) – fortitude and commitment. It is much harder to try to see the whole world/the world as whole and Life as fundamentally pedagogical, to question everything, to try to learn from everything than it is to live in a belief – a story – that learning only takes place in school and that what we do on 'our own time' isn't education; or, to accept the story that education is only successful if it can be proven through 'right answers' and 'well-demonstrated skills' to select groups of people. It is much harder to write academic essays for an academic institution without clinging wholesale to the false confidence of presumed and projected certainty; to avoid, and I am sure I have not always succeeded in doing it in this thesis even though I have certainly tried, the knowledge-dominant trap of presenting my 'findings' about ignorance in a way that says: Here is what I **know**, emphatically and unquestionably, about the benefits of *I*gnorance and you would

be wise to heed! It is far harder to realize that the perceived speed of my culture

(Alberta Education, 2011-2014, p. 3) is a construct in which I am complicit than

to just do my best to keep up with traffic and, as one with a few different stakes in

Education, to help others do the same. It is almost impossible sometimes – in the

race of ideas that are born from a view of life as fundamentally pedagogical – to

slow down to a pace that allows for mindful presence and attention, for "evolving

and shaping," for "deep attending" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p.

230). It is hardest of all, in my personal "journey of the self or soul" (Huebner,

2008, p. 405) to know when to settle down altogether, to stop (Nhat Hanh T. ,

2012, p. 29), say nothing. Just breathe, where "breath is the bridge which

connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts" (Nhat

Hanh, 1987, p. 15); where the Cartesian notion that thinking defines being can

itself pause and breathe (Descartes, 1960, p. 24).

One of the running fears of this thesis, especially and as already

articulated in the last section several times, is that this writing will alienate or

offend professors, teachers, fellow researchers, policy makers, parents, students

(of all ages) – my friends and the very people with whom I most wish to share in

these conversations and ideas… It is hard sometimes, to know when and what to

share. It is difficult to assimilate that what feels to be a deep and meaningful

observation might be better left unsaid in certain times and spaces, to certain

individuals, for whom that observation will not feel deep and meaningful, but

disrespectful or offensive. It is especially difficult to know where are the

boundaries when embedded in a system, such as my university, that remains built

on a steady diet of knowledge accumulation and *proof* of knowledge

accumulation; a system that does not always see itself as I might see it so that this

very differing of vision lives precariously on the edge of turning into its own sets

of double projected certainties, mutual accusations of traditional (not my hopeful)

ignorance. This sort of binary dueling, as expressed earlier, is rarely generative.

So, it is hard, in short, not to become "paralyzed" (Miller, 1998, p. 148).

Moreover, this difficulty of knowing when and what to share, to say – the

constant wondering if it will degenerate from "friendly discussions without rivalry

or envy, without aiming to arrive at an agreement, without striving to be right,

simply conversing" (Larrosa, 2011, p. 170) to the confines of debate or argument

– deepens in acknowledgement of the power, also already mentioned, that the

university has, right now, over my very real future well-being and that of my son.

I worry about what to say, about what I should leave out.

I worry about what I have said, about what has been left out.

It seems as though, the bubbly and spilling nature of a liberated curiosity

and creativity – of rigorous questioning and imaginative attending to that which

exists beyond the surface (Smith, 1999, p. 46) – carries with it the potential to do

real harm if not assisted by humility and compassion and I do not know if this

thesis has gone too far, or not far enough, in its suggestions or in its attempt to

meet the requirements to complete a master's degree in Education at the

University of Alberta. I do not know if it can or will offend people I care about.

I know that, more than once in the last three years, I have been in

conversation about these ideas and felt a pushing back, a powerful resistance that

bade me stop (Nhat Hanh T. , 2012, p. 29). And listen. And many times I did stop. And listen. More and more, in fact, in a journey alongside ignorance, I find an increased ability to listen, to offer humility. But, even on that path, I have found myself in conversations where it is I who feel offended by limitations perceived in others; by how it seems that they perceive me. It is important to persevere in these conversations too, though, to subdue parts of a long-trained nature to 'argue' (fight!) for 'my' perspective instead of trying to make of it an *offer*; to listen and ask questions to clarify the resistance I, myself, unintentionally trigger. A key hope is to be able to stop and attend deeply (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 29) with greater and greater ease, and not only in encounters with resistance.

Ultimately, though, the resistance that I have encountered has often been from the types of people who might accuse, and have accused, me of deficits in understanding of 'how the world works.' It has been suggested that what I offer relative to a generative, holistic approach to Life (as Education) through an embrace of an IBW has the power to lay waste to education as it exists, put hundreds of thousands of people out of work and hobble the economy. And, I must own that depending on *methods* of *implementation* the embrace of an IBW could well do just those things. I am compelled to consider all possibilities if I am to work from ignorance as I define it, to 'walk my talk' as a one-time colleague of mine often says.

The challenge becomes to build a response able to communicate clearly, and as already attempted in this work, that I do not propose an IBW as broadly applicable strategy. I propose it as a way of knowing and being in the world;

something to carry with you wherever you go, to have wherever you are. It seems

highly unlikely that our systems will fall apart if one more person, for one more

moment of one day, takes a breath and sees the whole cosmos in their apple

(Shubin, 2013, p. 28). I hope that there will be no sweeping calamity, if this

breath, this momentary vision of connection, allows that one person to go home

and see themselves in their partner, in their child and visa versa (Nhat Hanh T. ,

2008, p. 49; Jardine, 2000, p. 50); to go to work and see themselves in their

colleagues and visa versa. Even if the change in this person's vision and

approach itself precipitated a change of vision in others, on other days, in other

moments, eating their own cosmically connected apples, it seems unlikely that

this change would come in ways that would do grievous harm. If anything, to

recognize interbeing – however fleetingly – is to recognize the essential truth that

when we harm others, we harm ourselves, we harm the world.

If a three year (lifelong) journey alongside ignorance has left me less

inclined to argue and make my sharp points; if an embrace of ignorance as it is

opened up and explored in this thesis requires deep awareness and humility in the

face of the other; if an encouragement of curiosity and creativity as method,

instead of a steady, replicable strategy for knowledge accumulation, makes us

more likely to wonder and puzzle about the world and ourselves, and pause and

breathe, and think before we act; if ignorance can, in fact, be a way of knowing

and a living practice that teaches us to see the whole world in ourselves and

ourselves in the world – then I am not afraid of these ideas spreading at their own

pace and as they will. I am not afraid to keep speaking of them and learn to do so with ever-increasing gentleness as I grow deeper into them myself.

At their root, and in their essence, these are not scary ideas. The fear and discomfort appear to come from our closely held certainties about how we think change happens, and should happen, in the world. The fear appears to come from the ahistorical, culturally myopic belief that how we do things *now* and *here* was and is unavoidable. The fear comes from a forgetting of, and unwillingness to embrace, the beautiful gifts and exquisite burdens of complicity in a world that has always been, and will always be, *whole* despite a systemic imposition of compartmentalization, duality and knowledge dominance.

Wouldn't it be nice to not be afraid anymore?

Wouldn't it be beautiful to accept people with a "hospitality without reserve" (Britzman, 2007, p. 12) and be accepted that way in return? To lovingly confront a world that is "wearing out" (p. 12), embrace "fragile" and ever-"unfinished" projects (p. 12), and claim dependency on fellow living beings? To accept the "promise of responsibility" (p. 12), the exquisite burden of complicity? It may be heavy and is – will be – difficult, but I wish to share in a journey, with all the "Beings Innumerable" (Jardine, 2000, pp. 40-41). I wish to "work from all this ignorance" (Britzman, 2007, p. 12) and model this journey for my son, to share and discuss it with him as a journey that begins with humility, lives from curiosity, responds creatively and always offers compassion; a holistic journey to embrace ignorance in all its potentiality as a way-of-seeing, an epistemology and an ontology.

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