Communing at a Distance?: Critical Early Childhood Communities Amidst a Pandemic

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Abstract

What is the shape of the early childhood classroom community in the midst of a pandemic? How might critical communities emerge in the face of physical distancing and pandemic fears? Is connection possible when masked and six feet apart? Through the narratives and reflections of a classroom teacher, this paper explores the co-creation of a PreKindergarten classroom community amidst the challenges and limitations of COVID-19. It examines notions of authority, resistance, connection, and dissonance as essential elements of the critical work with young children. Through narratives of the everyday experiences of the children and their teacher, this paper addresses ways in which deep connection, vulnerability, and questioning of the status quo emerged during the 2020-2021 school year.

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Meaning Making in Process: A Disclaimer

When working and writing with children, I often think of myself as identifying constellations. Through their play, their stories, the children provide the points of light in the night sky. As a teacher, I see those points of light in relation to each other, connecting them into a story of us, of what we might do, of what we might mean to each other. It is an effective way I have found to make meaning with children. And at the moment, it eludes me, thus the disclaimer.

In the following pages, I will tell you some stories of our year together, our pandemic year. I can feel that these stories belong together. They form a constellation of some sort, some image of relatedness and connectedness...but I do not know what that image is. As a teacher and a writer, I find myself blundering forward, struck by moments that must be included, but unsure of why. In these pages, I come to you without a complete story, without the clarity and safety of outcome. Perhaps because we do not yet know the outcome of this strange year.

And so I ask you to stumble through these stories with me. To breathe in the fumes of the disinfecting agent as we sterilize the blocks. To smooth your voice into calm authority, despite the fear. To radiate love and care through your eyes, with all other facial expression hidden by a mask. Step into the stories of our pandemic classroom, and perhaps as we stumble through these moments of light, we will find a constellation.

Waiting for Community: September 2020

In the first days of September 2020, I sat in the darkness of my classroom, breathing into the stillness. The room waited, holding its breath, tingling in anticipation of the coming morning, and the lives that would pour into it. After another twelve-hour day of preparation, I sat in this dark, tingling room, waiting and wondering. It wasn't so different. The toys, tools, paper, markers, small rocking chairs, collections of books, and other trappings of early childhood were still there. But the red flags of pandemic marched through the stillness, asserting crisis in the meticulously labeled sets unique to

each child, the bizarrely distanced tables scattered through the room, and the strategically marked "play spots" that would allow the children to move throughout the room, always settling at six feet apart to play. Fully masked at all times. Never touching each other. Never handling each other's toys. It was unimaginable.

And yet it was the same. The same prickling potential of stories yet to be made. The same books, waiting to be read. The same toys, waiting to be played with. The same teacher, sitting in her room, waiting for the story of the classroom to begin. But **would** it begin? Would we find each other in this bizarre map of distance? Would we see through the masks, past six feet, and into each other once again? I waited, and wondered. Tomorrow was the first day of school.

As a preschool teacher, staring into the maw of the fall of 2020, the core of the question was one of the critical community. In the face of the community, little else matters- spaces, materials, limitations, all of these shrink when compared to the power of the critical community (Souto-Manning, 2010; Freire, 2000). Therein was the possibility. Therein was the fear. Was the critical community still possible in the grip of the pandemic?

As we began this year, the word unimaginable floats to the surface, for we were, in fact, stepping into a reality that had yet to be imagined. Envisioning the future of our school days was a cacophony of dissonances, the sameness of school in concert with school as we had never experienced it before. The question of the critical community of the classroom was at the center of these fears, wonderings, and dissonant imaginings. There is an essential core of the early childhood classroom; this core is ambiguous and ever-changing, emerging and evolving with the world, the children, the teachers. The nature of this "critical community" is its ever-becomingness, its unattainableness and the powerful movement and flow created by something that is simultaneously present, yet never quite there. Yet there are elements of sameness, of consistency amidst the unknowability, markers that call us home to the familiar space of critical work with children. What this means, in all of its richness and complexity, is a critical community rife with collaboration, disagreement, power, and irrefutable connectedness. It is a space that holds both connection and dissent, that invites children into a space of nurturance and dissonance, framing these as essential elements of the experience of schooling. Freire (2000) describes the nature of this community as, "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes as horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (p. 91). When I say community, I do not speak of the "we are all friends here" nonsense that typically affixes itself to early childhood language. I mean the deep, powerful communities that hold one another, that carry each other, and that make us more in our imperfect union than we were as our separate parts (Souto-Manning, 2010). Steve Seidel (2001) describes this as, "The group holds the individual in its arms," (p. 312), a rich description of the ways we retain our selves, while becoming more in the arms of the dialogue of the critical community. This is the critical community that grows and holds us as we become more through our work together. Yet, how would we hold each other without touching? How would we find our way to each other from our carefully distanced "play spots" and our never intersecting play materials.

The critical community is the foundational component of early childhood learning as I know it, a space of connection and conflict, of joy and resistance (Souto-Manning 2010). In the context of my classroom, these communities are spaces that teach toward and hold connection and dissonance, supporting children (and teachers) in seeing themselves as deeply connected and yet utterly different amidst connection. The ever-becoming connection holds us, binds us to one another. The invitation of disagreement, of questioning one another and the status quo, invites resistance into the space, creating a nuanced space of safety as well as dissonance. It is, as Miller (2010) describes,

"community without consensus," that "possibly enables representations of self, other, and the curriculum field to be unfixed, mobilized, destabilized, and released as forces capable of recombining in as yet unimagined and perhaps untraceable ways" (2010, pp. 99-100). This is our space of becoming as a classroom, a place where both teachers and children open themselves to the "as yet imagined," as the curriculum and classroom become through communities of collaboration and dissonance. "What will happen," I wondered, "if we can't find each other in the distance? What will we do?" I shivered at the thought of a year reduced to abc's and 1,2,3s, calling to each other from literal and figurative distances that could not be crossed.

And yet, this is the gift of the dissonant and unimagined story. It has yet to be written. It waits to be told.

Pandemic on the Playground (Part I): September-October 2020

The early days on the playground were bizarre both in their strangeness as well as their sameness. The children circled each other, unsure of how it might be safe to connect, unsure of their masks, unsure…just, unsure. Yet the seductiveness of play took over quickly, and the space erupted into shouts, scramblings, and sweat tousled games in the heat of early September.

As teachers, we too swam in the thickness of the unsure. Should we stop them? When should we stop them? Were they running too close together? How far apart was far enough? But we too raced, and played, getting used to the sweat in our masks as we came back to ourselves as teachers on the playground, leaving the sterile distance of Zoom behind. As I flung myself down the green twisty slide, surrounded by its familiar plastic feel and smell, I wrapped that sameness around me and breathed it in.

Yet, there was a new playmate with us on the playground this year: fear. This was a new kind of fear, a bone-deep, anxiety that I have not experienced before with young children. After all, they had spent the last six months learning how to protect themselves from the virus. To protect themselves from death. And this was a new kind of fear for our playground.

This pandemic terror led to a fear of their friends. An unknowing brush on the arm could cause an intense argument. An accidental bump could lead to hysterical tears. These were the reapings of the pandemic for our children.

One day, as the children raced across our playground (carefully grouped so that no "pod" came in contact with another) we heard the telltale cries from the sandbox. These were not the "we-are-working-it-out" tears that come with the early social dynamics of the classroom. These were cries with the edge of panic; I quickly ran across the playground. The source was Evan, sitting in the sand, arms flailing, "He touched me! He touched me! It's the virus and he touched me!" he howled.

Adam looked on, holding a shovel, looking abashed, "I didn't mean to touch him," he said, eyes down, "I just wanted to use the shovel and he wasn't sharing," he explained, his voice wobbling. "I didn't mean to give him the virus!" and he too, burst into tears.

When I look back on the beginnings of this year, I am staggered by the sheer number of rules. There were so many rules dictating our days, constantly necessitating explanations to the children of why, and how, and how we might do it differently. As a consummate and questioner and flouter of rules, I found myself in unfamiliar territory. I see my role as teaching children to question the status quo, to resist the rules; this is the purpose of schooling (Bentley & Chan, 2020; Souto-Manning, 2010). But now, the

stakes were different. Our hope in those early days and weeks was that these rules would keep us alive.

These rules, the no-singing, no-touching, handwashing, lap-banishing demands that they made harkened back to a different story of school, a story about institutional power, marching in lines, sitting in an assigned spot, and doing what you are told (Foucault, 1975/1995; Green, 1973). It was a story of teacher as absolute authority… and there is something about that, in this particular moment, that had to be true. We had to keep them safe. We had to protect them from this unseen illness that could destroy us all. Could we do it? And more specifically, could we keep them safe, and still create spaces of resistance, of questioning the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Souto-Manning, Llerena, Martell, Maguire, & Arce-Boardman, 2018)? What does it look like to question a status quo that might be keeping you alive?

Over the years I have come to find growing communities of resistance to be a reasonable, thoughtful process that I can envision, even amidst uncertainty It is an ever-changing, unfixed yet consistent part of my practice, just like setting out the magnatiles, filling the paint jars, and checking books out of the library. Our communities and their resistances will never exist as permanent or stationary, but the invitation to question and resist is a constant amidst ambiguity. And then we were faced with an entirely new space of rules and regulation, and the breath-stopping question: will resistance put us in danger?

As teachers and members of the classroom community, we tumbled amidst these roles of learner and authority, orienting and re-orienting ourselves as the media, the virus, the shifting data, and our knowledge of pedagogy engaged in frenetic, often contradictory conversation in our minds. And with the headlines of, “Schools are not super spreaders!” and “Shut them down!: Why schools are unsafe” raging in our brains, we did our work. We comforted, we challenged, we questioned, we played, and we carried the risk so that the children did not have to.

Pandemic on the Playground (Part II): September and October 2020

We did not address this issue in that moment of Evan and Adam’s unravelling on the playground. There are moments for discussion, and moments for comfort, and that tear soaked hysteria was a time for drying tears, dusting off sand, and taking deep breaths together. The following morning, we came together as a class in our culture circle (which was decidedly less circular due to the need to be spaced 6 feet apart)

We explained, “We’ve noticed that people feel afraid sometimes on the playground when they are close to other kids.” The classroom erupted.

“Yeah, sometimes somebody bumps me!”

“And I was on the slide and then Tillie came down and her feet touched me”

“I was on the monkey bars and then Michael touched it too. Then maybe I’ll get the virus!”

After the initial wave of comments, we stepped in calmly, firmly inhabiting our teacher stance.

“Is there anyone on the playground whose job is to take care of you?” we wondered, and the room fell silent.

“The teachers..”

"You guys…"

"Dana and Lizzie…" the kids' voices hushed, and a sense of peace beginning to permeate the fray.

We continued, "So, do you need to worry about these things when you play? Do you need to worry if someone accidentally touches you?"

Heads slowly began to shake.

"We will worry about that, we promise," we assured. "It is our job to keep you safe. We love you, and we will tell you if you are not being safe. You don't have to worry about that. Your job is to play. Our job is to take care of you. You can just keep playing."

With that, we practiced. We role played. We repeated, "Just keep playing. Just keep playing."

And we hoped that they would…

As we taught amidst this community-in-crisis, this classroom trying to come together but impeded by fear and trauma that we were (are) just beginning to understand, it became clear that we had to make choices about how to carry this for the children. We had to unburden them so that they could come together in some semblance of normalcy. In these moments, I would frame our pedagogical choices as "…in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it" (Freire, 2000 p. 80). And so, "on the side of freedom," we stepped into the role of "teacher authority," taking on power in order to create possibilities of freedom and resistance for the children.

The above narrative illustrates the role of the culture circle in the classroom as an ever-evolving space that holds resistance, problem solving, and community development (Souto-Manning, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2013). Despite the physical disconnectedness of the six-foot distance, this space had been identified as the place where decisions were made, problems were addressed, and community practices were developed (Derman-Sparks, 2020). As pandemic teachers, we navigated between roles, taking on the role of authority "on the side of freedom" (Freire, 2000, p.80) in order to shoulder the burden of children's fear, thereby creating spaces of resistance and freedom for the children. When required to regulate themselves by pandemic fear, children's freedom, connection, and community were impeded. By taking on this regulatory role ourselves, we hoped to make possible the freedom and democracy of play.

Pandemic on the Playground (Part III)- October 2020

In the coming weeks we watched closely, repeating with the children again and again, "Just keep playing," and the idea began to take hold. Ever worried, his face of study of fear and pride, Evan would return to us again and again. "We were running and he touched me. But I didn't cry! I said, 'Just keep playing!'" We congratulated him, celebrating his flexibility. And we wondered, would he ever be able to actually "just keep playing"?

One October morning there was an exceptionally appealing leaf pile in the corner of the playground. The groundskeeper had just raked it, and, of course, we were not supposed to be playing with it. It was tantalizing; there was no way I could refuse them. We could rake it up later, I reasoned as I stepped closer to the pile.

And then I saw him. There was Evan, in the midst of the leaf-flinging melee. He hurled leaves into the air, watching them as they soared beautifully back to earth. Michaela stood next to next to him, and inspired by his idea, tossed her own armful of leaves. Then it happened. Her arm brushed his on its way up. Evan froze, face tightening in fear. I watched him turn inward for a moment, and mouth the words, "Just keep playing."

And he did.

Choosing Something Other than Fear: September 2020

As I write this piece, its non-linear nature drives me to distraction. I want so much to present you with a story, cohesive and structured, with a clear beginning, middle, and (happy) ending. I want the clear image of the constellation. This satisfying structure makes truths, clarities, and happy endings (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). But instead I find myself amidst the chaos, leaping to the computer to add another important point in our constellation, our story, but unsure of how they all fit together. And thus as I write, I find myself turning to the non-linear lens of myself as teacher in this story, and the choices I made in pandemic teaching. I do not profess these choices to be right, true, or representative of anyone else in the teaching profession. These were profoundly personal choices, neither good nor bad. Just mine. And these choices impacted the shape of our critical community, what was possible and impossible.

Drop-off during the first weeks of school can be hard, and difficulties were compounded by the pandemic reality. Gone were the days of parents coming into the classroom, setting up cubbies, reading books, and giving last goodbyes. If this was going to work, we needed to limit the people on campus, streamline the drop offs, and avoid more contacts as much as possible. This resulted in an elaborate (and entirely ingenious) drop-off and pick-up. Its elegant complexity still boggles my mind.

But, back to that morning. As I stood on the playground, directing children to the appropriate doors and entrances, I heard familiar cries from the drop-off gate. Someone was having trouble saying goodbye.

I walked over to find four-year-old Elena, clinging to her mother's neck and wailing. Her mother looked at me helplessly, "I know you can't touch her, but I don't think she's going to go!"

My whole body was drawn toward Elena, her familiar goodbye struggle, knowing that I could help, I could make this better. My arms went up to reach for her, and then I froze. I wasn't supposed to touch her. There was a line of cars filled with parents all around us, kids racing on the playground; we were on a veritable stage. How could I touch her? How could I not?

All of these thoughts tumbled through my mind in the split second it took me to make a decision. "It's ok," I said calmly to her mother, "Is it ok with you if I hold her?"

Her mother's face broke into a relieved smile (or at least her eyes smiled above her mask) and she passed me Elena's backpack, and then Elena herself. Her tiny body curled into me, face buried in my neck, legs wrapped around my (very pregnant) belly.

"It's ok, it's ok," I crooned, "I've got you." Her body relaxed into mine, and I almost sighed at the familiarity of it all. We began the walk across the playground, her small body entangled around me, heading into our first days of school.

When I look across the days, weeks, and months of this pandemic year, I feel particularly aware of a choice that I made as a teacher. I chose something other than fear. Again, I am not celebrating this choice, or suggesting that it was even the right choice. It simply was the only way that I knew how to be with the children. I share the narrative of me and Elena because of that moment, that split second of conflict between the pandemic fear and the weeping child. And it was no contest. I was a teacher, she was a child, and she needed to be held. So I held her. Viruses and pregnancy aside, I am a teacher, this is my job, my self, all that I know of how to be, and so I chose teaching in place of fear. I chose to be there, all parts of me, and to know somewhere deep inside that it was safe, that it was worth the risk, that this was the right thing for me.

When I consider the impacts of the ways I enacted my role as teacher in these months, it leads me back to this question of critical communities, and how they came and are coming to be even amidst the limitations of the pandemic. In these spaces, there is a need for vulnerability on the part of each member, particularly the teachers (Souto-Manning & Bentley, 2016). When we, as teachers, make ourselves vulnerable, we signal in an authentic way that this space is safe for the vulnerabilities of the children. This dynamic feels even more essential in the face of in-person schooling during the pandemic. Was it safe for us to connect? Would we get sick? Would we infect our families? This threat was there for all of us. If I was asking the children to take the risk, to fully engage, I had to be willing as well. That is not to say that the children needed to hold each other and dry one another's tears on the playground. But there was an impact of the teacher entering with her whole self, bringing her whole self into the classroom in spite of the pandemic. To come to them without fear invited a fullness of self, a safety in the critical community of the classroom. If their teacher was fully present, perhaps it was safe for them too. (Greene, 1973).

I want to be clear that I am not advocating my particular choices here. In fact, I am not certain that they even were my choices. They seemed to choose me in the moment, the heartbeat of my pedagogical experience guiding me in such unfamiliar territory. Teachers answered with their full selves in so many different ways during this past year, from six feet away, from the limbo of in-person and virtual students, and from across their screens. We all found different ways of being fully there, fully present, of inviting community in a time of crisis. For me, and my tiny sliver of the teaching world, this critical community emerged in part from the physical presence of my teacher self in our classroom. As Elena's tear streaked face nestled into my neck, all other demons were dispelled. I was here. I was their teacher. And all else was quiet.

Acts of Resistance: October 2020

It was October 1st, with all of the glory of fall in New England, a canopy of orange leaves, sun in the sky, and a bite in the air. I was carefully transitioning the class, spacing the kids at their cubbies, trying to make sure that no one's materials touched each other, and checking the thoroughness of handwashing while my co-teacher brought them into the classroom, settling them into their 6-foot-distanced morning meeting spots. I was running late on making my way to the classroom, after cleaning the seeming monsoon of water, soap suds, and paper towels that coated our new handwashing room. Wiping my wet hands on my pants, disinfecting again, and picking paper towel out of my hair, I stepped, disheveled into the classroom.

The room was quiet and bubbling with barely concealed excitement. Over the sea of masks twinkled laughing eyes, darting back and forth between me and my co-teacher. Suddenly she whispered, "Now!" and the class turned toward me. I wondered what collaborative mischief they were up to now. Suddenly they began to whisper-sing "Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Dana! Happy birthday to you!" My legs grew shaky and I sat down, eyes filling with tears. Many

times over the past months I wondered if my life as a preschool teacher, and all of its rituals of morning meetings, happy birthday songs, and mischievous togetherness were over forever. But here we were again, glorious in the everydayness of our community and its rituals, the community holding me in its arms on my special day.

At the end of the song, Matilda leapt up and said, "There's no singing allowed, 'cause of the virus. But we sang **anyway**, because you need a birthday song!" "Yeah," added Trevor, "It's safe enough because we whispered. And we can do the rules different, with whispering. Because it's your birthday."

And I leaned into the embrace of our community, of their defiance of the rules, their assertion of our care for each other in the face of the rules, the danger, and the need for connection. It was the best birthday song I have ever heard.

I share the above moment because of its representation of children's resistance in a time of regulation, a time of pandemic. As often is the case, it was in a small moment, one that might have slipped by without the understanding of its significance. I mean, they were only singing, happy birthday, right? But these seemingly small moments are the center of meaning making and social structure in our early childhood world; we are a community made up of its small moments (Forman, Hall, & Berglund, 2001). In reality, there are layers of significance here, telling about the community, the space, the questioning of the status quo, and the enacting of resistance even within the control of institutions (Foucault, 1975/1995).

In re-membering this narrative, I find the space in which it occurred to be particularly important. This was our meeting space, the culture circle space in our classroom (Souto-Manning, 2010; Freire, 2000), the space in which the "official" business of school was conducted (Lindfors, 1999). Placed as such, within the "official" space of the classroom, it was a space sanctioned by the authority of school, of and amidst the official-ness of the institution. This was also space in which the rules about singing were questioned and manipulated to meet the needs established by the community. This simple moment of "whisper-singing" happy birthday signals the power of that critical community to come together around shared meaning, and to engage in collective resistance within official school spaces.

As I think back to these moments, listening to their song, I am struck by the ability of the critical community to assert itself even amidst the strictures and fears due to the pandemic. In case you wondered, conducting a culture circle in which sixteen masked people are placed six feet apart, all to the tune of an air purifier churning is not the most conducive of settings. We could not see each other's faces. We struggled to hear one another. Making eye contact required a concerted effort. The demand of togetherness and connectedness created by sitting in a circle was entirely absent. And yet, while the demand was gone, the connectedness was not. Our community, the community without consensus (Miller, 2010) had come anyway. And perhaps the connection was even more deep because we had to fight for it, to call across distance, to look past our masks, and to find each other in spite of the fear and distance the pandemic might have wrought. Matilda's declaration, "There's no singing allowed, 'cause of the virus. But we sang anyway, because you need a birthday song!" is an assertion of the values of the community, their shared rejection of an unsatisfactory status quo, and a collective resistance in favor a ritual of care deeply valued by the community.

The Eleven O'clock Hum: January 2021

It was late morning in January, and the class was deep into the eleven o'clock hum of working time (our free choice time in the classroom). There is something powerful about this time of day, this time of year. The children have had time to settle into their

work with materials in the classroom, and a deep sense of engaged satisfaction permeates the room. Even from our distanced "play spots," the hum continued as children efficiently used the space, the materials, and each other as resources in their many different endeavors.

This time is particularly powerful for me as a teacher because it allows me to deeply engage and play with individuals and small groups of children. The class itself is such a hive of connected productivity that I am afforded the freedom of operating as a learner and playmate.

And so, January 14th 2021 found me curled up on our blue rug, listening to Micah as he narrated his current book. Micah recently realized that he did not need to "have all the words" yet for writing a book. "I can draw the story Dana!" he explained, "And then you write some of the words if I need them." It was a luxurious moment, sitting engaged with Micah, watching the story emerge, a full member of our community. It was also bittersweet, as I knew it would be one of my final moments in this place, this time, with these children. As our community had grown over the past months, so had the baby in my belly. The children had predicted, cheered, theorized, and planned with me, collectively naming the baby "Maxilla." And it was finally time to say goodbye. Early tomorrow morning I would head to the hospital, saying goodbye to these children and welcoming a new one.

There was no better way to spend these last moments than curled on the rug, one member of a community at play. The hum of work enveloped us, and I knew that it had happened. Our critical community had come to be, in spite of, or even because of the many obstacles of the pandemic. It was bigger than me, than any one of us. It would continue on, even though I would be gone. "Dana!" cried Micah, interrupting my musings, "I need some words here!" and I turned back to him, diving deep into our work together one last time. As I shifted toward Micah, the baby moved inside of me. It was time to say goodbye.

And so, what was our constellation? Did we find it?

The truth is that there is no one picture, one story of a classroom community. We and our stories are infinite. And we are never done, never complete, never fully collected, tied up, and represented in any one story. Yet, I continue to tell, to gather us together in necessarily incomplete tellings of our stories and what they might mean (Miller, 2005; Dyson & Genishi, 1994). As I read through these narratives, these small points of light, they tell me one story of the persistent power of critical communities. They tell me that our practices of teaching toward democracy, of questioning the status quo, of growing communities of without consensus, these practices are not bound to ideal settings or situations (Souto-Manning, 2013; Miller, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). In fact, these are the practices that carry us through the darkness and turbulence, asserting themselves in spite of fear and danger. They are the practices that draw a child into our arms despite the fear of physical touch, that draw a community into work together despite carefully measured "x's" keeping their bodies apart.

I close with this narrative of the eleven o'clock hum because of what it means, what it signals about the story of our community in the 2020-2021 year. It was a connection that was unimaginable as I looked into the darkness at the beginning of the school year; it was more powerful because we had to fight for it. I have been warned about the cheerful narrative, the shiny telling of a singular, tidy story, and so let me give a moment to our untidiness. Our classroom life together is consistently untidy, never complete, and frequently uncheerful. We are messy. We are never still. Yet, I find that I am driven to make stories of our days, and to find knowings even amidst the unknowability of evolving communities (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017; Dyson &

Genishi, 1994). As a teacher, I feel a need and perhaps a right to "know" some things, to tell some stories of who we are, we were, we will be, despite the futility of every fully knowing or representing one moment or community. I turn again to Miller's words of a community that "possibly enables representations of self, other, and the curriculum field to be unfixed, mobilized, destabilized, and released as forces capable of recombining in as yet unimagined and perhaps untraceable ways." There is something powerful in being unimagined, something that allowed us to connect and become in ways I could not have envisioned. Through it all, they were ever inventive, ever resilient, finding ways to each other, to us, to the community that would not be stopped, despite each obstacle in our way.

I will never forget this year, but not so much for its strangeness or challenges. I will never forget this year because of what it affirms for me as a teacher. Our classroom communities of resistance are without bounds. They will always be possible, always be the center of all that we do. We will invite their questions and challenges, bringing resistance into the heart of schooling. And the children will take this up, spinning our communities into the changing worlds around us.

Teddy Harris Bentley was born the morning of January 15th, 2021. My first communication was to the class, who were waiting for news of their baby. Although they were disappointed that we did not call him Maxilla, Teddy was accepted as a reasonable alternative.

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