

Embracing Equity in Text: The Power of Mode and Perspective

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English Practice



English Practice Journal: Call for Articles

Deadline June 15th, 2023

Do you have great classroom ideas to share? Want to share your teaching practice? Tell us about the books you've been reading with your students! English Practice is looking for articles about ELA Teaching! (read below for more details!)

Evoking Harmony: Joy & Inspiration Through Convergence (Call for Articles)

In line with last Fall's BCTELA conference theme, English Practice invites you to submit teaching ideas, classroom inquiries and practice-focused research, reflective and critical narratives, poems, fiction and other arts-based renderings, or book reviews for our upcoming issue.

Entitled **Evoking Harmony: Joy & Inspiration Through Convergence**, this issue opens a space for exploration and conversation around how we can create learning environments that are developed through relationships, honouring voices and mutual respect, in teaching English Language Arts.

Guiding questions may include: How might we create safe spaces for students to have mutually respectful conversations? What kinds of texts might we bring into our classrooms to ensure diverse voices are being represented and celebrated? What are multi-modal ways students can demonstrate their thinking and learning? How can we design our lessons to spark inspiration from various access points?

We have four sections to assist you in preparing and submitting your writing:

- Teaching Ideas (classroom lessons and strategies)
- Investigating our Practice (teacher inquiry)
- Salon (literary & arts-based pieces)
- Check this Out (book reviews)

Submissions can be emailed to: englishpracticejournal@gmail.com

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Embracing Equity in Text: The Power of Mode and Perspective

“How do I create something out of nothing? And how do I create my own life? I think it is by questioning, and saying to myself that there are no absolute truths.”

-Amy Tan

Welcome to our issue *Embracing Equity in Text: The Power of Mode and Perspective*. In this issue, we invited educators to share how they create safe spaces and bring representation into our English Language Arts classrooms. Themes include building community with students, empowering their voices through writing and discussions about equity within and beyond texts.

Guiding questions may include: How do we create spaces that encourage students to embrace equity in text? What modes and perspectives resonate with us? How does our identity impact our students in our role as a teacher? How might we foster positive learning communities with our students that encourage them to share their voices? How might we use texts as windows and mirrors to address what is happening in our world?

In this issue, practitioners engage us to critically think about our practice and subject. We learn about how students were able to engage in genuine discussions about racism, diversity, and equity through texts written by a multitude of authors. We are encouraged to examine teaching and learning environments and ask ourselves, how spaces affect the way students learn. We are inspired by the power of collaboration amongst a group of teachers who were able to help students find their voices through writing and building community. As well, we are reminded to take care of ourselves as individuals in this work.

We hope that you find this issue of our journal to be an enjoyable read. We want to thank our editing circle for their time and effort in peer reviewing the submissions that were sent to *English Practice*. We would also like to thank all the authors who took time to share their thoughts, insights and practice with us. We look forward to future contributions from more of you and hope that this journal inspires you in your own practice as an educator.



Belinda Chi is a Program Consultant-Learning Lead with the Burnaby School District and has an M.Ed. in Educational Practice. She has a background as an elementary school teacher and has worked in teacher education at Simon Fraser University. She is currently a PhD student in the Department of Education-Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia. She is passionate about social justice and inclusion, critical literacy, and building community through personal narratives.

Elise Costa is a Secondary English teacher in the Burnaby School district who recently completed her Masters degree in the MATE (Masters of Arts for Teachers of English) program at SFU, which notably explored many texts by BIPOC authors. She has been an educator for 12 years and most recently worked as a Faculty Associate in the professional pre-services teacher education program at SFU. Elise has been active with SOGIE throughout her career, and works hard to share text with students which explore social justice issues.

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Dedication

This issue of English Practice is dedicated to our dear friend, Don Blazeovich.

Don Blazeovich was a teacher, mentor, friend, and member of our BCTELA family for over 10 years. He was on our BCTELA executive as a Conference Committee member, Editor for Voices Visible (Student Writing Journal) and Editor of English Practice Journal. He was a teacher in Burnaby for 25 years and taught in Edmonton and in Australia prior to his teaching career in Burnaby. He had a Master of Education from Simon Fraser University and was a mentor and instructor in Advanced Professional Studies at SFU. He led multiple workshops on early learning, literacy, and inquiry throughout his career. Don was an incredible human being who graced us with his positivity, calm nature, and wisdom. He truly touched the lives of so many people through his various identities in his professional and personal life. Don is remembered for being an enthusiast of bunnies and being passionate about learning and teaching from the power of story.

“What is the bravest thing you’ve ever said? asked the boy.

‘Help,’ said the horse.

‘Asking for help isn’t giving up,’ said the horse. ‘It’s refusing to give up.’”

- *Charlie Mackesy, The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*



Don passed away peacefully surrounded by his family in the early morning of July 27th, 2022.

Kyle McKillop

BCTELA 2021 Conference Address

Never have children in BC been so empowered, so awake to their own potential, so awake to their own strengths and needs. But at our 2021 conference, we were also at the end of a year filled with brutal news: the graves of children who died in residential schools, a Muslim family wiped out by a car-driving terrorist, George Floyd murdered by a police officer. These are hard mirrors to stare into. How do we help our students grow up wiser than us? Better supported than us? More empathetic than us? This led our organizers to their theme: “Embracing equity in text: the power of mode and perspective.”

I saw a quotation from Senator Murray Sinclair the other day: “Systemic racism is based on a structure of ideas where the policies and practices force even non-racists to act in a racist way.”

I think of English Language Arts as the humanizing subject at school. Reading, thinking, creating: these make the space we need for deep understandings, for reassessments, for empathy. I think ELA is a place where you can begin to open a child’s mind so they can see beyond the system, beyond what they know, to notice in the unfamiliar a familiar joy and love.

But our subject can also, intentionally or unintentionally, be harmful. The literature in our classrooms can be rife with stereotypes or perspectives centred in whiteness. Our “policies and practices” can be infected by the colonial mindset of the society we grew up in. Even our insight has so often been forged in the absence—through sidelining or erasure or exile or genocide—of those who are different from the white mainstream. I think of the words of the poet Billy-Ray Belcourt, from the Driftpile First Nation: “he told me he was into natives, but he couldn’t love the traumas / hidden in my breathing.” We need to examine the traumas and the healing, to embrace the sadness and the joy. Because we need to be mindful of our effect. We need to confront our biases and blind spots. We can’t afford the harm of systemic racism, so we need to break free of those structures.

So I wonder: what does my classroom say about equity? What does my classroom say to students about their cultures, their skin, their abilities, their gender, their class, their sexuality? What does my classroom say to the very body that carries them to class? What does my classroom say to their hearts, to the question of what part of them matters? How does my classroom support, in universal and individual senses, as students stretch toward the goals they set for themselves? How do I turn my power—how do we turn our power, our carefully cultivated teacher power—into a kind of student power that levels the system into something useful for all?

Our conference’s workshops had many answers to these questions, many ways forward: practical strategies, deep thinking about texts, student-centred learning, system-shifting teachings in Indigenous ways of thinking and being. And obviously, at the centre of what we were doing was the start of that way forward: we listen. We listen carefully.

But out of that listening needs to come action. We need to examine our practices and find the current of deep change. We need to consult our students. We need social justice and restorative justice in English Language Arts. We need to fill our shelves with books that sing in our students' voices, relevant books that speak to their moment in time with characters who could be our students, questioning how we do things. We need our students in English First Peoples courses, so that no one leaves school without knowing that pain, that resistance, that joy. We need units in equity. Our students are on Instagram, posting about this. They're in The Tyee, telling us this. We can still do better, and we need to insist on it to ourselves. We can do better. We need to insist. We *need* to insist.

Kyle McKillop is the president of BCTELA and the English Lead Learner at LA Matheson Secondary, on the traditional and unceded territory of the Katzie, Kwantlen, Qayqayt, Stólō, Stz'uminus, Tsawwassen, and WSÁNEĆ First Nations. Find him on Twitter: [@KyleMcKillop](https://twitter.com/KyleMcKillop).

Amanda Wardrop

Finding the Light

I've walked and written every single day since the beginning of the pandemic. That's not quite true, but it's as close to the truth as I can get these days because the real truth burns and I don't have anything left to sacrifice. I think I've been writing and walking to create moments of light in what have been incredibly hard, dark days for me. As an extreme extrovert, having all access to groups of people cut off has been soul destroying. And my commitment to the greater good and community care created an impossible intersection for me. So I've walked. And written. I've dragged myself through what have felt mostly like endless days of sludge.

I heard that the human brain, out walking, is a problem-solving machine. I worry about the state I would be in had I not committed to a daily practice. I worry a lot these days and there have been very many of 'these' days. I write because I know routine and structure are good for me even though my cells rail against them constantly. I write because I have nothing left to burn but I have sacrifices to make and sometimes words are my least expensive offering. That's not entirely true either; words are costly but catch fire and turn to embers so well.

I, so very quickly in the pandemic, couldn't do anything more virtually—there was no joy there, no connection. Parties and celebrations were desiccated shells, devastating in their emptiness. And I have been one to linger in joy effortlessly, to call joy to me and to have it respond. My hopeful heart has never put up with cages and escapes every ligature it has ever encountered. I tried everything: I meditated; I danced, arms extended to the sky; I watched shows I knew well for comfort; I cried, I took photos of flowers (those of you who know me know what a desperate sign that is); I wrote; I walked. Without the blue light of screens there was more natural light, but still not enough to sustain me, and certainly not enough to allow me to fly.

And that was the work I was doing just for me. I've had to carry the needs of my immediate family, my three kids who haven't had a normal-ish year in ages, my partner struggling to support me, struggling. I've worn the responsibility of care for the kids in my classes and their adults, their families and the combined weight of their expectations and disappointments. *Encanto's* Louisa feels a little too close, a little too on the nose.

Teaching through a pandemic has been awful. Unrelentingly, except in the short moments the awfulness relented; the moments when human interaction won out against the gaslighting, the exhaustion, the constant assessment of the state of throats and of nasal passages. Education staff have been asked to work through change after change in a world of uncertainty, as if we were not living through the pandemic at the same time, as if we had endless capacity when no one had any capacity whatsoever. And of course, teaching through a pandemic has revealed the depth of commitment, the compulsive generosity of spirit, the indomitable resilience of educators. But we're still being asked to double down on the work, to sacrifice ourselves and our labour at the altars of the institution. Nothing has been taken off our proverbial plate, and yet we've been given more plates to juggle when really we were just learning to juggle in the first place. There is nothing left to give, nothing left to burn, we will not last

the night (thank you Ms. St Vincent Millay). We're (rightly) asked to work in a trauma informed way but that is (wrongly) not modeled to us, not extended to us, by the systems within which we are working.

I have always loved what I do. Yes, of course, there is so much that is challenging about this profession, but I have always loved it. I have written about that love over and over again. I have professed the ridiculousness of the fortune of my life that I have been able to do what I love and love what I do. I love the students in my room. I love the way they show up, I love the way they ask me to do better, to be better. I love the way I am compelled to learn more. I love the way I have had to grow this heart to accommodate the radical compassion that is demanded of me. And I was crying in the car on the way to and from work. I was sitting in my car until the last minute, trying to 'gather my strength' as my grandfather always used to say. I was losing words—there were more gaps in my language than I could account for (I wondered if there was something more severe happening, if I were starting to show signs of dementia). I couldn't be the person I needed to be in my classroom, or in my life. I was defaulting; all ash and cinders.

Sometimes I've felt like the Matchstick Girl. I've said goodbye to so many things and not mourned them properly yet, I watched the wisps of smoke curl up and away from me. I've used every strategy I have and every reserve I could tap into—and they were once vast. I am well insulated; I had an uninterrupted income, relatively good health, access to care, paid sick leave, company at home. And I struggled. Eventually, after asking every person who ever loved me for the permission I couldn't seem to give myself, I took a leave to manage my mental health. I walked and wrote every day I was off and I made myself some breathing, feeling, room. I try to live a life that respects my belief that the personal is political and the political is personal and so I wrote about my leave, my struggles, my privilege, and shared that writing.

Deciding to take time to care for myself, when I knew it would negatively impact the students in my class, was one of the hardest decisions I've made. Writing that down makes it sound stupid but it was and still is true for me. I believe in honouring my commitments and I wasn't going to be able to in my professional realm. I felt like a failure, like a self-centred ass, like a malingerer, even though I knew better. The work of having my thinking convince my feeling was Herculean.

Taking some time off didn't "fix" me. I wasn't going to be able to make myself whole (that is far too dependent on spending easy time with the hoards of people I love) but I did make some gains. I was able to return to my classroom and offer the young humans there something. I'd depleted the stores I was able to stock within about a month of my return but at least there was something there. I walked the demons of disappointment and sadness into the light, wrote the demons of hopelessness and depressing repetition onto pages that I could burn. These practices cracked the internal darkness just enough to allow for some light. That is a small truth, I'm pretty sure.

I'm relieved we're not hearing about "the unprecedented times" and how our "health and wellness is a top priority" anymore (my tongue still isn't healed from all the biting I had to do to it). I'm relieved that there are maybe easier times ahead. I've begrudgingly learned a lot more about myself, about wellness and gentleness, about community and connection, about collective action and care. I'm still walking and writing myself through teaching in a pandemic, maybe I can carry you through a moment of it as you read this. I'll build an altar of sorts, offer these words in hopes that they lift you, carry your needs, wishes, and thoughts, the way incense does. Take care, loves.

Amanda Wardrop is a passionate and engaged educator who loves bringing play and ridiculousness into spaces with students. She is a mother of three, a sometimes writer, a theatre lover, and an ocean swimmer. This year she will be working with student teachers striving towards certification and can't wait to see them thrive.

Eileen Bennison

School as a Place of Occupation: The Importance of the Physical Environment in Student Well-being

Introduction:

“I have always felt it is our job to make children fall in love with the world”

-Ken Winograd, 2016, intro.

Our job as teachers is *not* to simply have students “acquire special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations is limited” (Dewey, 1938/1986, p.46). Rather, “we need to see ourselves as designers of learning” (Halbert & Kaiser, 2013, p. 37). Our job is to “arrange for the kind of experiences” that are linked cognitively and schematically; it is to “arrange for the kind of experiences that... promote having desirable future experiences” (Dewey, 1986, p. 248). Emotion is tied to learning, therefore, if we want students to learn, we do not want to drill them, we want instead to make them fall in love with the world (Winograd, 2016, *intro.*, OECD, 2018).

Getting students to fall in love with the world is no small task given the physical architecture of most schools (Cheryan et al. 2014). If we want students to fall in love with the world, we need to provide students with a world *or environment* that is accessible, engaging, and worth loving. For a student, the environment primarily consists of the classroom and the school. It is composed of physical objects that often define where students sit, how they move¹, and who they interact with. Physical objects also define what or who is valued and how we are able to think (Cheryan et al., 2014; Paul, 2021p.129-137). Teachers often think about the person-to-person interactions in the school environment, but if we are truly going to make students fall in love with the world and all that is in it, it is vital to think of the person-to-physical-space interactions. How does the environment *engage* students? What about the environment is *accessible* and motivational? How does it *inform* occupation²? What *biases and beliefs* does it hold (Cheryan et al., 2014)? *Who* does it contain? How does it influence pedagogy?

Kaiser and Halbert challenge us to ask: “Have we designed a learning environment that allows each young person to be valued for his or her unique strengths” (p.38)? Consider, for example, the design of desks in rows. Desks in rows represent the belief in meritocracy and individuality. On the other hand, tables with pots of shared materials represent the belief that students need to learn to talk to each other and the notion that resources can be shared. Desks in rows allow for individual thought, practice, and knowledge transmission style pedagogies (Park

¹ Hannon & Peterson talk about how empowering freedom of movement is for students, and how important that is for student well-being in their book “Thrive” (p.175)

² Occupation is about doing (work), being (leisure & well-being), and becoming. I would argue that occupation is the purpose of school as it encompasses the present and the future. Occupations must be accessible.

& Choi, 2014). Tables and chalkboards allow for communal knowledge and inquiry or problem-based tasks (Beichner & Saul, 2003; Liljedahl, 2020; Park & Choi, 2014,). Desks imply that conversation should be limited, and tables imply freedom to move where one wants within a space. Hannon & Peterson (2021) talk about how rare and empowering it is for students to have freedom to move within a space (p.175). Classrooms with student work and pictures of students engaging in activities outside of school value background knowledge and show that we see the child as a capable contributing member who adds to the collective knowledge base³. In my experience classrooms and hallways with motivational posters and store-bought bulletin boards show that we value who the child will become, but they also imply that adults do it better. Classrooms and schools filled with books (and reading places) imply that literature is valued as is time for reading, researching, leisure and quiet⁴.

For place-based educators the outside becomes part of the classroom and contains different affordances. A city park (for example) creates different interactions and ideas than a forest will:

Imagine a child playing in a small patch of woods, where the trees might be hiding places, the foundation for a fort or branches to jump and swing. The tall grass in the understory might be a bed, a hiding spot, or a farmer's field. Now compare the imaginative possibilities this child has with a slide or swing. (Erickson & Earnst, 2011, p.97)

In my experience a raked clean park with play structures encourages tag games and some limited forms of dramatic play and early numeracy. I find that, on the other hand, places filled with sticks, logs, and long grass encourage a wide range of dramatic play, cooperative gross motor work, balance work, construction, letters in the sand, and early math skills. In the book "Outside My Window" Liz McCaw 2017) also talks about how creativity flourishes in the forest as there are a wide variety of "loose parts" (sticks, stones, logs. .) that can be used (given new value) for a multitude of purposes (p. 19-24). In my opinion, pristine environments, regardless of being inside or out, may show care, attention, and pride, but they do not encourage one to look closely and "create new value"⁵ as they have little to create new value with.

The environment also influences what is taught: walking around a city or town as part of a water inquiry also leads to more work around mapping streets and civic planning (Endreney, 2009). Walking around a wetland leads to conversations and learning about the water cycle and animal habitat. Staying in a classroom lends itself to literacy, math, coding, and writing. A school with a stage will encourage drama and the arts, a school without will not. And, perhaps most importantly of all, when one thinks of the environment as the third teacher, one can consider place attachment. It is important to note that when a person feels a sense of belonging and attachment to place (environment) identity is fostered, and educational outcomes improve.

What does a well set out classroom look like?

As the "physical environment impacts physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development and also shapes behaviours" then what a classroom looks like may very well depend on what your intentions are (Can & .nalhan, 2017, para. 12). If there are times in the day when knowledge transmission is the goal (and there will be), a straight and organized space with a distinct front is better (Park & Choi, 2014, p.769). If the goal is to encourage inquiry, story workshop, visible thinking, or play-based learning, then there will be various manipulatives or loose parts that promote multiple modes of use (Mrs. Meyer's Kindergarten, n.d.; Liljedahl, 2020; Ontario 2016 Kindergarten program section 1.3; reggioemilia, 2015). If the goal is to "create a more positive attitude toward learning [and] more relationships with peers" (Park & Choi, 2014, p.755), and to shift the role of the teacher, then a "de-fronted", asymmetrical classroom with lots of vertical surfaces to share thinking on is crucial (Liljedahl, 2020)⁶. If the goal is "relaxed spaces in which students feel safe to take risks, to try, and to fail" then the room needs to be neither too neat nor too chaotic (Liljedahl, 2020, p. 72). If the goal is to learn about science or places

³ In my opinion

⁴ Again: this is my opinion: although reading is both an academic and a leisure/wellness activity and needs to be highlighted as pleasurable. There is research by Morrow & Weinstein (1982) that back this up, but I can't locate it.

⁵ The OECD recommends creating new values as a competency goal for schools (2018, para. 18).

⁶ Interestingly, Both Park & Choi (p.763-770) and Liljedahl (p.76) noted that the restructuring of the learning environment *also* changed the actions of the teacher and made them more like mentor-coaches.

in the real world, then the classroom might be outside (Endreny, 2009). If the goal is to have students try new leisure activities to promote health and well being now *and in the future*, the classroom will allot time for these activities. It will also contain multiple spaces, such as playgrounds, hiking trails, and classroom corners with materials such as exercise equipment or art supplies for self-directed activities ⁷(Carmen Bennison, OT, personal communication, Nov. 1, 21).

The impact of environment on educational outcomes:


When one thinks of paying close attention to classroom set up one typically thinks of the Reggio-Emelia approach and young children. However, the most striking study I have read on the environment as the third teacher has nothing to do with small children and the Reggio-Emelia approach, rather, it has to do with higher education. After reviewing relevant research studies, Park & Choi (2010) themselves studied the effects of traditional lecture style university classes with Active Learning Environments. They discovered that, while traditional desks in rows are best for basic knowledge transmission, they contain “positional discrimination” and that seat choice in the “shadow zone” is often based on a student’s GPA – students with lower GPAs end up in positions that are not as conducive to learning and therefore learning is inequitable (p. 758-760, p.768).

The Active Learning Classrooms on the other hand, promoted “positive learning attitudes regardless of their GPA level” (Park & Choi, 2014, p.769). Active learning classrooms are much like Liljedahl’s (2020) thinking classrooms. They have tables where students can work together, whiteboards or large computer screens for sharing ideas, and a clear view of lecture screens from anywhere in the room. The Students in Active Learning Classrooms stated that they had more interactions with peers and the instructor. Interactions are important because they state that “active involvement in peer and student-faculty interaction are the most significant factors on student achievement” (Park & Choi, 2014, p.751, citing Hay, 1995). Universities that chose to change how they set up the physical classroom environments were deliberately trying to change educational outcomes. The universities in the United States and in Korea that were highlighted in Park & Choi’s study were looking for more than knowledge, because an “information...based society...[needs to] emphasise the development of critical analysis competencies,...communicating, and cooperating...to create novel ideas” (Park & Choi, 2014, p.751). Lecture halls and classrooms with desks in rows do not allow for cooperation, critical analysis, or good communication. If one wants to improve educational outcomes, they are going to need to embrace different school and classroom designs.

Classrooms whose physical designs promote competencies also improve general knowledge and understanding of concepts. As stated above, Park & Choi (2014) reviewed relevant research studies and found that Active Learning Classrooms showed “a highly positive effect on learning outcomes” (p. 752). One of the studies they looked at was from North Carolina State University. The university set up classrooms to accommodate both physics labs (typically done in small groups), and lectures (large groups) in the same space at the same time. This careful set-up considered not just pedagogy, but the size of the tables, the nature of the chairs, and the access to others in the room. The physical set-up of the classroom was important because it took “advantage of cooperative learning techniques and helps students form learning communities [and].... Interactions between students and with faculty are the most important aspect of a successful college career” (Beichner & Saul, 2003, p.3). Not only did students do better on traditional exams in these classrooms, they also did more advanced problems (Beichner & Saul, 2003, p.10). Park & Choi (2014) summed up the Beicher & Saul study well: “SCALE-UP classrooms resulted in improvement of students’ problem-solving ability, promotion of conceptual understanding, better learning attitude and understanding of the main physics concepts, and dramatic reduction in failure rates, particularly for women and minorities” (p.752).

The OECD (2018) also encourages schools to come at education from a competency-based perspective, and there is good reason to try, as students need to come out of school able to communicate, deal with opposing views, and create new value (OECD, 2018, para 17-21). Students who are able to communicate well and deal with opposing views need to be able to self-regulate. Dewey (1938/1986) talks about how it is “idle to talk of self

⁷ The caveat here is that you must also allow time for reflecting how leisure activities make you feel so that you will continue to do them outside of school to reduce stress and increase happiness



control” when learning experiences are not integrated into one another (p.38). As the above examples illustrate, classroom set-up can promote subject (and sensory) integration. Therefore, classrooms designed to be active learning classrooms will tend to foster self- regulation through subject integration. Collaborative set-ups that promote the movement and sharing of ideas through vertical learning surfaces are “suitable for classes focusing on integrating concepts, information, and opinions...as well as application of theories into practice” (Park & Choi, 2014, p. 767). The SCALE-UP classroom study was a perfect example of integration as they increased student success when they integrated “all activities, including laboratory experiments [in order] to build on one another in sequence for greater learning impact” (Beichner & Saul, 2003, p.3). Active classrooms go a long way towards creating the skills in students that we need, therefore, more classrooms need to be designed as active learning environments.

Environment as Place: The Importance of Attachment:

Nelson Goodman (2021) talks about how the stars came into existence because we named them. While the naming didn’t cause them to exist, the idea is very important. When we looked at the heavens, we teased out objects, reflected on them, studied them, *attached* to them, and they became part of our world. When we call the “environment the third teacher” we begin to reflect on it, tease out meanings and create beliefs around it. Reflection allows us to examine our beliefs and intentions. It is important then, to think about the social nature of the classroom environment as well because “highlighting aspects of place that shape student’s experience can serve to remind educators of their...responsibilities in the social construction of classrooms and schools as places” (Ellis, 2005, p.57). In fact, spaces and the relationships within them “fundamentally structure human experience” (Green & Turner, 2017, p.36) and become places when “a personal connection” is formed due to duration and *community involvement*. Once space has become place, it can provide “a source of security, comfort, nurturance, belonging, meaning, and identity” (Ellis, 2005, Huber et al., 2012; Green & Turner, 2017, p. 29, Hay, 1998). Place attachment is an important consideration in school because, according to Green & Turner (2008), place is a “significant medium through which human identity is created”, and therefore we want to make sure that students create a positive sense of place in school so that they in turn have a positive self-image (2017, p.1). How we physically structure the environment can cause students to either become marginalized or more of a community depending on the interactions it allows for (Ellis, 2005; Green & Turner, 2017; Hannon & Peterson, 2021; Huber et al., 2012; Park & Choi, 2014).

Conclusion:

There is a definite relationship between the physical environment that is created for students and student success. Paying attention to how we design our spaces can help us create a whole child by fostering a sense of purpose through integrated collaborative activities. The environment can also help us create whole children by fostering wellness – after activities that are cognitively demanding we can provide spaces that expose students to various leisure activities and help them discover healthy ways to regulate, de-stress, and feel good about themselves. The artifacts in our rooms can foster identity and engagement. Schools can become places that create identity and belonging if we physically structure them to be inclusive and empowering. Our job is to make students engage with and fall in love with the world, and we need to design learning environments that help us do that. The physical environment is a complex third teacher that demands much scrutiny and close attention.

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Kyle McKillop

Seeing Ourselves, Seeing Each Other

Composition 11 as a Study in Equity

It was April in a pandemic year; we were entering the last quarter, and I was on the verge of teaching Composition 11 for the first time. I was tired before I even started. But I'd been listening to other teachers talk about the potential for Composition to focus on nonfiction, and I thought that could be an engaging angle for me and for students. I also wanted the challenge of exploring a specific theme, though. I had just read Ibram X. Kendi's *How To Be An Antiracist*, and I was drawn to the intersections that he pointed out: it struck me that it would be both empowering and appealing to spend our time together studying equity.

I settled on the essential question of "How can we make the world an equitable place for everyone?" When I thought about it, though, I realized the enormity of what we would need to learn to make sure everyone had the same context. Because of this, I began to see the course as a series of themed explorations. Kendi's book helped me find those weekly themes: culture, colour, body, class, gender, and sexuality. Had time allowed, we could have covered more topics, but we had to prioritize. The remaining three unthemed weeks would focus on literacy skills, project work, and final conferences.

We started the class in a teaching circle, the first day and every day after. We shared each time: something about ourselves or our opinions, usually with a daily question to guide us. We also devised guidelines together in the circle: we took turns proposing agreements, then decided if we would accept them or not. Everyone in the room had to agree before we accepted any guidelines for the class. In other words, we modelled ideas of equity from our first moments together.

Our first exploration was cultural racism. I'm white, of British and Irish descent, but the majority of students at my school are South Asian. Starting with racism, which many of my students were unfortunately knowledgeable about, opened the door to further difficult discussions. We talked about our own cultures, but we also looked at concepts like the "myth of the vanishing Indian". In terms of texts, we looked at poems like Kiran Dhaliwal's "mother's tongue", Natalie Lim's "Arrythmia", and Manahil Bandukwala's "Plucked"—I love poetry, and I find that the brevity and honesty of the medium make it a powerful way for students to get a glimpse of another perspective. Plus: poems make us practice fierce literacy strategies. After reading her poem "Conversations with a massage therapist", we also had an hour-long session with award-winning poet Francine Cunningham, listening to her read and interviewing her about her writing life. Later, we looked at Jaye Simpson's "Urban NDNs" and Fatima Asghar's "Microaggression Bingo", as well Sonny Assu's graphic biography of his grandfather from *This Place: 150 Years Retold*. We also chose books for lit circles: almost 4/5 of the class chose Trevor Noah's *Born A Crime*, which they devoured and discussed regularly for the rest of the semester. And we began a pattern, in these 3-hour-long quarter blocks, of reading, talking, and then writing.

Throughout our reading, we tried to be guided in particular by Faye Brownlie's brilliant pair of questions: What do you notice? Why is that important? These questions are broad enough to be inclusive of all levels of skill,

giving everyone an entry point. Opinions were just as valid as those ELA concepts that we scaffolded over the course of the semester: poetic devices, for example, or perspective, or bias.

Next, we looked at ideas of skin colour: racism, colourism, internalized racism, antiracism. We watched Chimamanda Adichie's *The Danger of a Single Story*. We looked at articles from the BBC and *The Guardian* on light skin bias and colourism. And we looked at poems by Fred Wah and Hieu Minh Nguyen to consider how people internalize racism, before moving on to watch Kendi talk about what it means to be antiracist. We added some notes on creative writing technique, and I modelled writing a poem. Then we balanced all of this input with some output: we drafted poems, using prompts, and together we built a rubric based on the curricular competencies and our collective idea of what good writing looks like.


Our third themed week looked at the body. This was a deliberately open topic, allowing us to look at pseudoscience, aging, dis/ability, and health, both mental and physical. We looked at old texts on featurism and phrenology. We read Dorothy Parker's essay "Let Us Now Praise Accessible Suburbs". We looked at poems by Cindy Pereira, Aidan Chafe, and Malory Tater, as well as an essay by Alicia Elliott, each reflecting a personal struggle with mental or physical health. We also began our inquiry work, including planning, researching, and learning about what makes a quality source. The essential task was to explore an aspect of equity that the student found important: name it, define it, tell us about the process of learning about it, and describe what you learned and felt in the inquiry. I had planned for this inquiry to be drafted as an essay and then shared with the class as a speech. For the essay composition, we looked at Tim Bascom's fascinating piece "Picturing the Personal Essay: A Visual Guide", which shares some sophisticated structures that can make nonfiction feel like creative writing.

Our fourth themed week was split in focus: we examined ideas of class, while on the side we developed the inquiry. We also had to fit in midterm reflections. We read some serious stuff this week, though: a chapter of *The Communist Manifesto* really stretched our reading strategies. We also looked at infographics, an article by Boots Riley, and poems by Faith Arkorful, Liz Howard, and Jan Beatty. Class is not a concept I feel qualified to teach myself, but I'm a learner too and we were able to study together, getting a holistic understanding by analyzing a range of texts.

Next came sexuality, which began with an unpacking of terminology. As part of this week's work, we looked at what it meant to feel attraction, with some help from poems by David Ly (bonus: he's an alumni of our school) and Sappho. We also looked at queer loss and pain, with poems by Chen Chen, Jane Byers, and Jameson Fitzpatrick. Finally, we thought about what it means to fail at love, guided by Warsan Shire's "34 Excuses". We also had ongoing instruction to support our inquiry: for example, we talked about how to incorporate imagery to bring research writing to life.

Our final themed week focused on gender. The week began with a simple question: who here is a feminist? We watched Adichie's TED Talk *We Should All Be Feminists* to figure out what that really meant, noting too Adichie's controversial statements about trans people. We looked at "The Story of an Hour". We also read trans writers: Ivan Coyote's story "No Bikini", Jaye Simpson's poem "boy", Jennifer Joshua Espinoza's poem "Things Haunt". And we talked about gender roles and expectations by reading even more poems: Amanda Proctor's "Nicer", Beth Ann Fennelly's "What I Think of When Someone Uses the Word 'Pussy'", and even one of my own poems. We added some writing exercises and inquiry time.

The rest of our semester was spent in projects: Book Club wrap-up projects, our inquiry. We revised our essays extensively, based on peer feedback and on-the-spot teacher feedback, and in the end we agreed that there simply wasn't enough time to perform our essays as speeches. Instead, we shared them digitally, giving everyone a chance to read and learn from each other. Several students also chose to share their pieces on my website. After that, students looked back at a semester of feedback, rubric-based and otherwise, and decided how they were doing in the curricular competencies. They presented their evidence; we discussed it and settled on a grade.



In the end, students said they found the course to be powerful. I asked them to write an end-of-course letter to me, with the promise that I wouldn't read any until marks were finalized. One of our guiding questions came from Thomas Green: "What did you used to put up with that you won't put up with anymore now that you've taken this course?" In answering this, a student shared: "I learned that you don't have to educate someone on topics in which they have discriminatory views... [Y]ou can choose to walk away."

Among other things, I also asked what they wouldn't change about the course. One answer: "The first thing. I liked about this class is the number of conversations we had where we were all encouraged to speak our minds and put our opinions forward. This made the class more close nit [sic] and helped us learn a lot more not only about the world but also about each other." Another wrote: "when discussing I got to hear about so many other perspectives about the articles. It was an English class where I got to think and learn about things in the world that really mattered. The conversations we had were important and not something you usually talk about in regular classes."

My students were energized by the chance to study equity. They found the texts hard sometimes, but they were also energized by the chance to have profound conversations with a stable group of peers, conversations that could spill over into the wider class. They saw themselves in new ways, and they saw each other in new ways. And we managed it together, with everyone sharing power and responsibility as the course evolved and progressed. It was a joy. Or, as one student described it: "I love how instead of walking into class and opening up our homework we would open up to each other." Who could ask for more?

Kyle McKillop is the president of BCTELA and the English Lead Learner at LA Matheson Secondary, on the traditional and unceded territory of the Katzie, Kwantlen, Qayqayt, Stólō, Stz'uminus, Tsawwassen, and WSÁNEĆ First Nations. Find him on Twitter: [@KyleMcKillop](https://twitter.com/KyleMcKillop).

Margaret Matthew, PattiAnn Plowman, Amanda Rideout, Blaine Scott, and
Fiona Wood Inspired by: Faye Brownlie

Inclusive Strategies To Build a Sense of Positive School Community and Acceptance

During a virtual learning series with Faye Brownlie offered through School District 91, our elementary team at Fraser Lake Elementary Secondary School were inspired to co-plan a series of Language Arts lessons. These lessons were based on some of the strategies we had learned. For example, we used the **explode the sentence** strategy to help build engagement and the **whip around** to give all students a chance to share. We used picture books to engage students from grades 4-7 to think deeper and connect with concepts of inclusion & accepting self and others as they are.

Teacher Testimonials:

Fiona Wood (Grade 6/7)

These units have built a sense of connection between all elementary students because we are all teaching the same main idea, followed by some minor adaptations/tweaks for the different age groups. You know the kiddo's enjoyed it when you hear them talking about what their class did in the playground. As a classroom teacher, I have enjoyed the collaborative planning and follow up sessions to share with colleagues.

Amanda Rideout (Grade 4/5)

I found that by doing the prereading activities asking students what they are reminded of or what they are thinking gets more participation as there is less fear of getting the "wrong" answer. Also, students were excited to read the story and see if they were right! After reading with the end goal of the sequence being writing a poem, we started with noticing figurative language within the book and then creating similes and metaphors of our own in a small group, so it was less risky. I also took all the ideas that the students created and read them out without student names. They were all in awe of each others' work, which was a huge confidence builder for some. Then they were able to take those and write their own. My class also loved seeing/reading some of the poems from other classes as well since they were all doing a similar thing which helped to bring some sense of community across our classes.

Marg Matthew (Grade 4/5)

It was great working with the other members on the elementary staff. We had the opportunity to share and discuss our ideas. The staff felt more cohesive as a result. The books we selected all focused on recognizing your own positive qualities as well as recognizing them in others. We practiced different strategies for each book and decided what would work best for our kids. The process helped to build the accountability to try these new strategies. The students loved the activities. They were very engaged and enjoyed seeing their work posted in public areas of the school. They also like reading and seeing the other students' work from the other classrooms. This helped to build sense of community.

Patti Ann Plowman (Grade 5/6/7)

I loved having the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to incorporate our learning from the in-service sessions: planning lesson sequences and incorporating new teaching strategies. It made trying these new things less overwhelming, as we had many brains working together and could bounce ideas off each other before, during, and after the lessons. Although we had teachers of Grades 4-7 all starting out with the same plans, we were able to tweak the lessons to meet the needs of the kiddos at our grade levels and could adjust to incorporate mini lessons where needed. Students enjoyed the variety of activities we did with each of the books and put a great deal of effort into the final projects. They were excited to have their work posted and to see what the other students in the elementary end had done. These lessons really helped build a sense of community for our students and continued to develop the strength of the teachers as a team.

Blaine Scott (Grade 6/7)

I have enjoyed doing this work throughout the school grades. I love that my students are interested in the work other classes have done and comparing it to their own work. The books were engaging even for the age of my students.

Valentine's Day theme love, acceptance, kindness

Elementary Collab Valentine's Day plan: Begin the week before and finish on Valentine's Day.

Theme: Love, acceptance, and kindness.

Picture book: I Am Enough by Grace Byers

Day 1:

Pre-Reading: Introduce the book and prompt students to make connections where they can.

Read the story making sure to show the pictures as you read.

Post reading: Tell students we are going to ask everyone to share their connections. You can share 1 connection at a time and wait for the rest of the class to share, or not share, before you can share again.

Ask the class what they think the positive message/moral of the book is. Again, 1 share for all before getting another turn.

Discuss links to our Elementary P.R.I.D.E. values (I have included some suggested question prompts)

- **Purpose:** What is the author's purpose?
- **Responsible:** How are children demonstrating responsibility in the story?
- **Integrity:** How are the children in the story demonstrating honesty, honour, fairness, sincerity?
- **Dignity:** Are the children in the story demonstrating that they are worthy of respect, important, or that they and others matter?
- **Empathy:** Are the characters demonstrating empathy for each other?

Day 2:

Prior Teaching: similes, metaphors, personification

Re-read the book. Encourage choral reading where suitable.

Ask students what they notice about the language used in the text. E.g., rhyming words, use of similes and personification.

Mini Lesson Figurative Language if required.

In random small groups of 3 (where possible), students will discuss and come up with a way that something about them is like something. E.g., Like the dolphin, I am here to swim through my day (or something like that).

Optional share time, but again 1 share for all groups before getting another turn.

Day 3:

In small groups or individually, students will write their own poems using the following format for each stanza

I am enough because like a...

You are enough because like a ...

We are enough because like a ...

Set a goal for your groups on how many stanzas they are to write depending on ability etc.

Optional share time

Day 4 and 5:

Write a draft of the poem and edit it carefully.

Write final copy of poem on love hearts and display in hallways.

Students write a poem for a senior citizen and make a Valentine's Day card.

Made Valentine's Day cards and candy boxes for the local elders.

Wrote an affirmation for "I am enough".

Each class did their own version of student poems, and they were posted in the hallway for all to see.

Valentine's Day

Exchange Valentines and begin work on painted Mondrian Style heart, ending the day on a positive note.

Pink Shirt Day YOU ARE ENOUGH theme inclusion

Theme: Inclusion

Picture book: YOU Are Enough by Margaret O'Hair

Day 1: Tuesday 9-9:40am DO NOT show the book to the class.

Sentence Explosion # 1: Write the following on the whiteboard; *'I was born in a small town in Ukraine, where I spent the first sixteen months of my life in an orphanage.'*

Whole Class (WC) Ask the class to think about the sentence and Say Something regarding what they know or wonder about the sentence. 1 student shares at a time and all need to share before having a second turn. Write student comments on board around the sentence.

Sentence Explosion # 2: Write the following on the whiteboard; *'But some people don't understand.'*

WC Ask the class to think about the sentence and Say Something regarding what they know or wonder about the sentence. 1 student shares at a time and all need to share before having a second turn. Write student comments on board around the sentence.

Quick write: Tell the class the title of the book *YOU Are Enough* and ask students to think about how the 2 sentences and the title could help them to make a prediction/inference about what the book is about.

Show the cover of the book.

Point out the word *inclusion*. **Ask:** What do you know about this word? Use a thesaurus and come up with a class definition of inclusion OR Inclusion is... on a poster and have students add examples.

Read the book to the class making sure to show the pictures as you read.

Follow up with the Kindness Tree and write a positive/encouraging message on a leaf neatly.

*Rick Hansen *Inclusion Workshop* all classes had participated in this and we tied this information from this to our lessons.

9:40-9:55am RECESS

Day 2: Wednesday 9-9:40am PINK Shirt Day

Make Pink Shirts.

WC Brainstorm positive messages that could be included.

Follow up with the Kindness Tree and write a positive/encouraging message on a leaf neatly.

Day 3: Thursday 9-9:40am (Cougar Block)

Re-read the book. Encourage choral reading where suitable.

Discuss links to our Elementary P.R.I.D.E. values from Sophia's perspective.

Purpose: What is Sophia's purpose in the story? How can you demonstrate the same purpose at school?

Responsible: Sophia takes responsibility for her own happiness when she says, "I am only a kid, but I know I

am someone who is happy, loving, and kind.” How do you take responsibility for your own happiness? What could you do?

Integrity: honesty, honour, fairness, sincerity

Sophia says that “*being different can be lonely etc Everyone needs a friend.*” How is she demonstrating integrity in her school? Why do you think that people who look/sound different make us feel uncomfortable? How can you act with integrity when in this position?

Dignity: worthy of respect, important, show pride in yourself through your actions.

Sophia says that “*Friends help one another etc.*” How is what Sophia is doing demonstrating dignity? How would you demonstrate dignity if you were the only person around? Would you ignore the situation?

Empathy: Sophia says “*Be YOU wherever you are.* “; and “*You aren’t perfect (no one is!).*”

Why would this be an example of empathy in this story? Can you think of a time that you did, or should have shown empathy at school?

Follow up with the Kindness Tree and write a positive/encouraging message on a leaf neatly.

Day 4: Friday

Re-read the book. Encourage choral reading where suitable.

WC Brainstorm the positive messages in the story and write them on the board.

Make a bumper sticker with a positive message and display in the hallways. The messages could be taken directly from the text or be one the students came up with on their own.

Follow up with the Kindness Tree and write a positive/encouraging message on a leaf neatly.

Kindness Tree was put up beside the school office for the whole school to see.

Title: The Magic is in You

Authors: Colin Hosten and Brooke Vitale

Theme: Self-Acceptance

As a group we selected 9 inspirational quotes. Each teacher printed up the quotes to have ready for the first class.

- You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take – Wayne Gretzky
- Be a voice not an echo – unknown
- Nothing is impossible, the word itself says “I’m possible” – Audrey Hepburn
- Why fit in when you were born to stand out – Dr. Seuss
- Life will knock us down, but we can choose whether or not to stand back up – Jackie Chan
- It makes a big difference in your life when you stay positive – Ellen DeGeneres
- Be you. The world will adjust – unknown
- Never let success get to your head and never let failure get to your heart – Drake
- Imagine if we obsessed about the things we love about ourselves – unknown

Day 1: Gallery Walk (30 minutes)

Groups of 3, choose recorder. Read quote and discuss with group: meaning, why it’s important, questions, thoughts, ideas, etc. “say something” about it. Recorder jots down what people think about the quote. Groups will visit each quote for 2-3 minutes.

Day 2: Gallery Walk Revisited (30 Minutes)

Write up quote “The Magic is in You”. As a whole group, go through “say something” process and record ideas. Then say we are going to reread all the ideas and decide on what we think the quote means. Go back to their original quotes reread quotes and ideas. Summarize what the quote means based on the ideas written down – put * beside 2-3 ideas. Give 5-10 minutes. Have each group stand and present: say their quote and then

explain what it is about (have one person do each part).

Day 3: Concept Map (30 minutes)

Go back to “The Magic is in You” chart. Reread ideas and then decide on 3-4 words or short phrases (2-3 words) that capture the essence of the quote. Circle them. Have students go back to their quotes and do the same things (allow about 10 minutes). Choose 1 person to share the words. Teacher records the words.

Reread all the words/phrases. Have students suggest words/phrases that go together and why. Categorize all the words and discuss the connections. If there are any words that don't fit discuss why.

Read story. Stop and discuss as we read. Have students identify the movie and make connections between the words and the movies. Choral read “the magic is in you...”

Revisit our chart for “The Magic is in You”. After reading the story, would they make any changes?

Day 4: Tie the book to our elementary PRIDE Virtues and Humility from the 7 Sacred Teachings

PRIDE / Sacred Teachings (30-45 minutes)

Reread story. Relate each quote to PRIDE Virtues.

Purposeful - importance of hopes, goals and dreams, how to achieve them;

Responsible - it's up to you; believe in yourself and act;

Integrity - build the qualities of the person you want to be;

Dignity - be respectful of yourself and treat yourself like the special person you are;

Empathy - practice self-love and self-acceptance.

Read “humility” card from the seven teachings; read section in “Speak Your Truth” pp. 22 – 25. Discuss how it is important to be humble and not brag, but also be able to recognize your strengths and gifts.

One of our quotes was from Drake: “Don't let success go to your head. Don't let failure get to your heart”. We helped to come to the meaning of humility through this quote.

Complete writing brainstorm about themselves (hand-out). Give character traits list.

Day 5: Writing Task - Cinquain (30-45 minutes)

Explain how poem works. Share an example.

In partners, write a poem about one of the choices: desert, ocean, doctor, clown, sneakers, star. With partner, write a second poem about another off the list or a noun of their choice.

Together, write a cinquain about the teacher. Then use the information from their worksheet and the character traits list to write a cinquain about themselves. Then randomly choose name of another student in the class and write an anonymous cinquain.

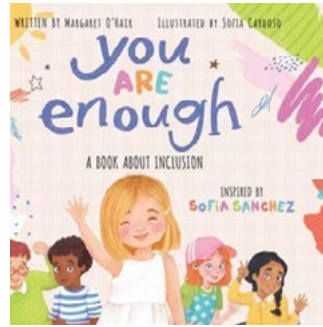
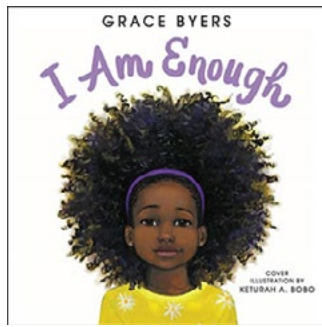
Have students type up their own cinquains and then the teacher will type the anonymous cinquain below.

Completed Cinquains were displayed in the hallways.

Each class will have a coloured set of the quotes to post in their classrooms for the remainder of the year. They will also be posted in the hallways and in the washrooms.

Wrap up: watch *Encanto*

Book Jackets



Student Samples:

I AM ENOUGH

I AM ENOUGH BECAUSE I AM LIKE A SKATEBOARD BECAUSE I LIKE TO ROLL WITH THE FLOW.

YOU ARE ENOUGH BECAUSE ARE LIKE A CLOWN FISH BECAUSE YOU ARE FUNNY.

WE ARE ENOUGH BECAUSE WE ARE LIKE LEAFS ON A TREE BECAUSE WE STICK TOGETHER.

I AM ENOUGH BECAUSE I AM LIKE A SCOOTER BECAUSE I TAIL WHIP THROUGH THE DAY.

YOU ARE ENOUGH BECAUSE YOU ARE LIKE A RESCUE DOG BECAUSE YOU LOOK OUT FOR PEOPLE.

WE ARE ENOUGH BECAUSE WE ARE LIKE HONEY BECAUSE WE ARE LIKE HONEY BECAUSE WE ARE SWEET.

JONAS

I Am Enough

I am enough because like friendship I'm here
To stay.

You are enough because like a bear you are
here to protect.

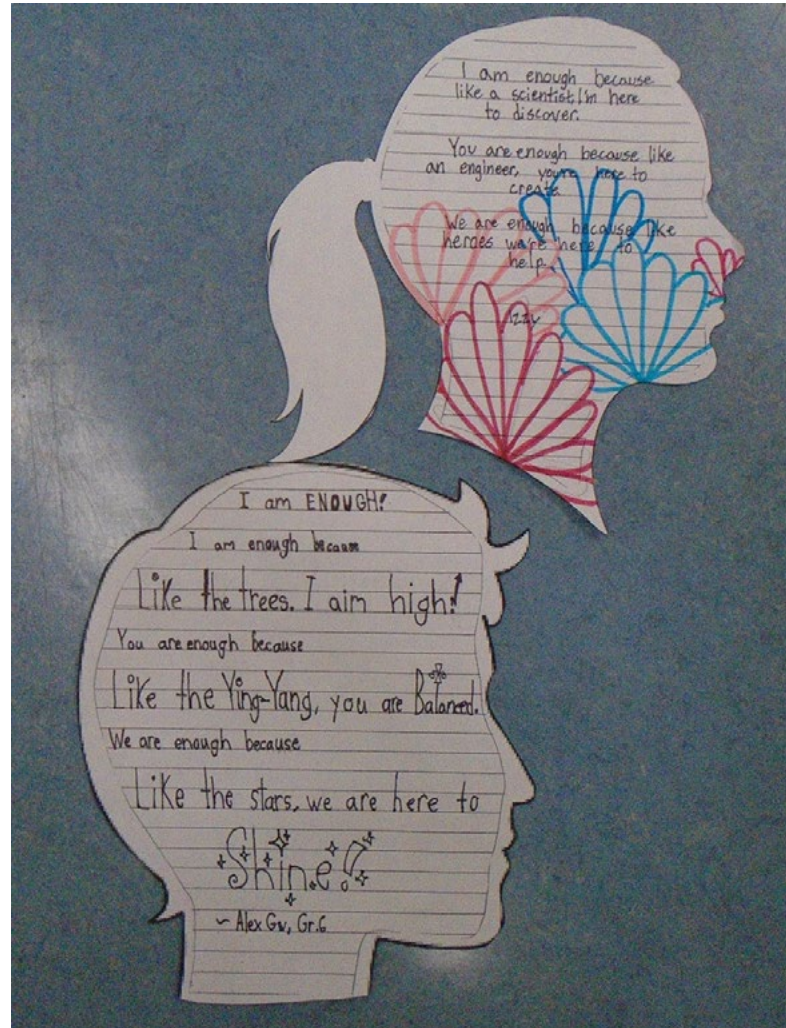
We are enough because like ants we are here
To work together to carry heavy loads.

I am enough because like a roof I am here to
cover.

You are enough because like a dog you are here
to guard.

We are enough because like water we are here to
flow wild and free.

Abigail Linton



I am enough

Like the wolf here to howl with pride.

Live and love until I die.

Like an eagle here to fly up so high into the sky.

Like a dog when I'm happy I go "Ruff!" and that's how I know that

I AM ENOUGH!!!

EVERY ONE MATTERS

- Miikka

I am enough because...

Like the sky my limits never end.

Like a hourglass I won't last forever.

Like a cloud I sometimes cry.

I am enough.

By: Wren

I am ENOUGH because like you I stand for what I love.

YOU are ENOUGH because like a flower you have to bloom.

WE are ENOUGH because like a shield we're here to protect.

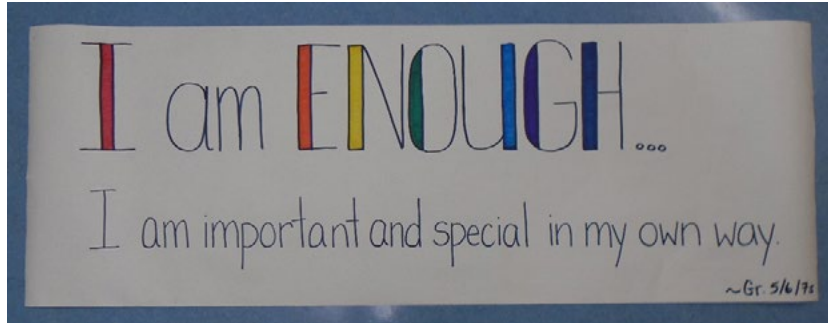
Love. Amen. Love.

I am ENOUGH because like a warrior I'm here to fight.

YOU are ENOUGH because like a flower you have to bloom.

WE are ENOUGH because like a shield we're here to protect.

The Grade 5/6/7 Class wrote uses weekly affirmations and worked together to write one for “I Am Enough” and posted it in the hallway:



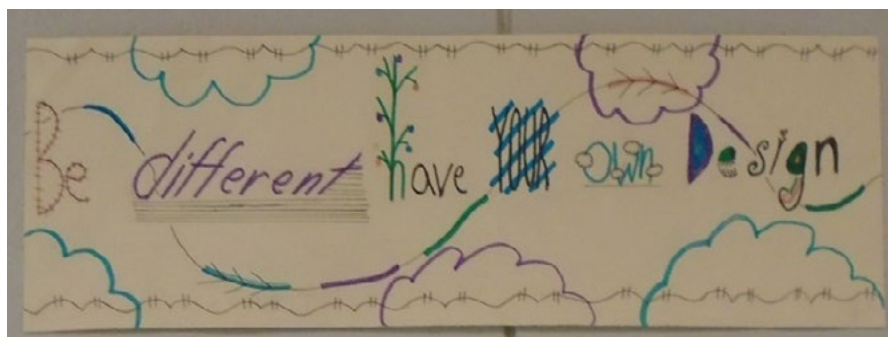
The idea of the **Kindness Tree** was to place it at the front doors so all students, elementary and secondary, and staff could see it, read it, and contribute to it:



The elementary HEROES group also made a rainbow heart display for the front of the school glass cabinet to remind everyone to ‘lift each up with kindness’:



“You Are Enough” Bumper Stickers:





BCTELA.ca

twitter.com/BCTELA

[instagram.com/BCTELA](https://www.instagram.com/BCTELA)