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Farm Camp Fun

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Farm Camp Fun

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Abstract

This piece is a personal narrative about the journey of a young woman in the constant process of becoming an educator. The wonder of children is what drives this individual, discussed here through the lenses of thought of adultism and with a focus on play. The fallacies of higher education and the systemic injustices the US is built on are touched upon, with specific reference to the industrialized standardized school system. The author promotes the notion that this nation needs educators who see the inherent wisdom in children, because kids are the ones who are the hope for bringing this world forward.

Keywords: education, adultism, play, fun, wisdom, children, hope

*Jan 22: Jake standing stoically in the dumping snow
Zachs huge smile when his turns clicked
how beautiful to be here*

*Quick transition
Drive out of snow globe
Breathless walk*

*...to a classroom
Beautiful in a whole different way,
broadening minds with such important topics,
Vero's powerful words
how lucky I am.*

I am in grad school. My whole life, I have been socialized to believe this meant a certain thing, but now I am not so sure. Actually, I'm beginning to question that, every day. I became bitter with academia years ago. So why am I here? The academy would have us buy, literally, into the notion of higher education because it will give us greater opportunities, make us able to function well in society, earn money and be successful. But whose version of success are they promoting? I drive out of the snowglobe alternate reality, a world of wind and snow and happy people who have bought completely out of that version of success, people who resent people like us, like me, to the beautiful brick buildings and neat lines of students filing down the brick pathways between them, and I marvel at the difference. I leave

a house of hardworking, blue collar young men, or my second home of slightly lost loving passionate wanderers to the walls of my classrooms and grapple with the paradox of having a place in all these realities, feeling drawn to all of them, yet not belonging fully to any of them. Many of those people think I have greater intelligence and am going further in life than them, because of my position. I respond, higher education does not equate to intelligence. From my view, I am certainly not "smarter" than them (after all that perspective on "smartness" is just a construct created by the industrialized school system) and they are certainly better functioning adults than me. In fact, I see people in graduate school, or even faculty, who still cannot function as average adults in society, and are no happier than my friends who are cooks or ski instructors. Is higher ed not just another way to put off the real world for a while? Hasn't the academy socialized us to believe we need higher ed to become 'above' or 'better' or more 'successful' than the people I surround myself with, who prove to me every day this is in fact not the case? What is really going on here? What is the purpose of higher education, really? I write this standing behind the cashier at Ridgeway Commons. Why, you may ask, is a grad student working a dining hall job, when so many "fancier" work study positions were available? My answer is partly because I wasn't interested in any of those options and partly, I think, just because I am stubborn. The narratives we have been taught our whole life by academia is that we go to school to avoid very jobs like this. So, here I stand.

If I am being brutally honest with myself, what I have learned in my time at Western is that the real reason I am here in grad school is because I am a privileged, white, upper-middle-class individual with highly educated and ambitious parents. I fit the mold exactly for what our school system defines as smart in my K-12 years. I am the product of a system that rewards the class, race, and obedience of the social group in which I was lucky enough to be born into. Therefore I have always been expected to achieve, in fact almost handed, a spot in higher education. Dr. Hayes is an environmental studies professor at Western who is rooted in the social justice realm, and in their class we learned that this is called the legacy of privilege- it flows (Howard, 2006) . These have been, to say the least, illuminating and difficult truths to accept about oneself. In fact I would suspect they apply to many others who are in this room. So the question becomes, what are we going to do with this privilege? Or, as my rowing coach would say, how will we carry ourselves with it?

In my first year of this program, during our residency here at the ELC, I was in constant conflict with myself. As I already stated before, I became bitter with academia years ago. This happened early on in my time at Bates College in Maine, when I was enrolled in far too many rigorously heartless science classes. My life was controlled by hours of nitpicky lab reports and decimal places, and I was miserable. After I graduated with my Bachelors of Science in Biology, I road tripped across the country with one of my best friends and we achieved our dream of living together in the ultimate ski bum paradise. Blue skies, champagne pow, endless bliss. All of last year my heart was constantly being pulled back to that life. But, I knew my place was here. Why did I leave my paradise to return to school? Why am I here?

For those of you who know me well, you probably already know the answer to this question. It is quite simple really: kids. For those of you who don't know me well- kids! I *love* kids. Everything that I do in my life is structured around, basically, hanging out with children.

This mentality has its origins one summer day when I was 16 years old, filling out an application at a picnic table in the sun, a dog licking my legs and chickens strutting by. Actually, we would need to rewind even further, to the basis of what makes me who I am- two incredibly supportive and loving parents obsessed with the outdoors, and a childhood spent almost entirely outside with our family. Skiing, hiking, camping, biking, kayaking all over New England and the world, my sister and I always covered in dirt and pricker scratches, catching frogs and scrambling around on rock walls in the woods. This appreciation of nature, the outdoors, and adventure has shaped the way that I lead my entire life. But anyway- back to the picnic table in the sun, where I began my first job. At the time I had no idea that that little farm would change my whole life. Because there, at Terra Firma Farm in Stonington Connecticut, was my first introduction to kids. I ended up working there for 5 summers in a row as a camp counselor. My boss Brie is an amazingly strong, determined, intelligent, beautiful person who as a single mom was raising two kids and managing her entire farm- she will always be one of my heroes. I ran camp with my sister Grophie and our best friend Emily, and gosh, did we laugh. We had many kids who would come multiple weeks in the summer for multiple years in a row, and therefore we built lasting relationships and friendships with them. Here, I learned that I find a huge amount of joy in working with kids- and, to my surprise, I was good at it. It was just so. Much. Fun!

How to Be a Good Camp Counselor

First, you must prepare.

Savor the silence in your car

You won't be hearing it again for a while.

Enjoy the peace of the road.

Soon everything will be chaotic.

Then you must learn. Fast.

Learn to be silly

To yell, clench your teeth, and breathe.

To be amazed by all the little things.

Learn to laugh at it all.

Learn how to catch chickens.

Lots of chickens.

Over time, you will get used to

speed counting dashing heads

memorizing names to shout and

never ending stress and giggles.

You will get used to

*little hands tugging you through
mud, prickles, and puddles,
to voices always calling you and
many sobs and stumbles.*

*You will be
followed by goats
slobbered by cows
scratched by bunnies, licked by dogs
electrocuted by fences and
attacked by chickens.
You will be outsmarted by guinea fowl,
knocked over by pigs,
and pooped on by
everything.*

*But then, you will fall in love.
The familiar company of the furred and feathered.
The warmth of wide grins
running to greet you.
The hugs, the smiles,
the joy of excitement.
The bonds made,
lives touched,
fun had,
and friends found.*

Lets fast forward now back to those miserable days of lab reports and decimal points (by the way, Bates is an amazing school and amazing place and I loved it there- I just hated the Biology major). My literal saving grace that semester was an education class I had taken on a whim, because I knew that I liked kids, and I needed at least one non-science class to fill a free block I had. During that year, entering that classroom was the only time I felt I could actually breathe. Our professor was an incredibly talented, passionate teacher named Anita Charles. In her class, she welcomed different ideas. She challenged us to think outside the confines of decimal places. One evening, I sat writing a reflection paper for her class, and I realized that the only joy in my entire week was when I got to go into the kindergarten classroom that was part of the requirement education placement for her class. That was my only light in that terrible time- hanging out with little kids. I sat there and began furiously typing on my laptop all of my frustrations and feelings. I hated school, I hated labs, I wanted no part of Biology anymore. I thought of my kids at Terra Firma and those little kindergarteners, I thought of the teachers in my K-12 who had been so influential in my learning experience and helped me to the college I was at, I thought of cell hell lab miserably trying to understand

the meticulous directions about DNA cell counts- and I had an epiphany. What the hell was I doing? I didn't want to be a biologist! I wanted to be a teacher! 3am, in the atrium of Pettengill Hall at Bates. I remember writing something like:

Teaching in general has this amazing ability to change lives; if you teach someone how to write their name, or do simple addition, they will have that skill for the rest of their life, and use it every day. That is an incredible gift to be able to give someone. The students give back to their teachers with their own lessons, their life experiences and perspectives, their stories and smiles. What profession could possibly be more rewarding? (from philosophy of Environmental Education paper)

I turned that paper into Anita with such excitement, terrified to tell my scientist parents about my newly decided life path but excited to see what Anita would say. She cried. Anita was actually also the person who first introduced me to the idea of environmental education and encouraged me to apply to graduate programs in the field. So- here I am! I have returned to the academy despite my bitterness and I left my dream in an attempt to fulfill another one: dedicating my life to kids.

Transformative Inquiry (TI) is a long process of inquiry that our Professors Nick Stanger and Gene Meyers have led us through for the last year or so, that for a lot of us has brought us to our Capstone topics. For my first ever TI meeting, I had thought hard about what had led me here. I brought Gene a picture I drew of kids and chickens and skis and question marks and told him about my summers at Terra Firma and my disenchantment with academia. I remember him smiling at me and saying, farm camp fun! That's what you need to focus on- how can you bring farm camp fun to the work that you do? And I have never forgotten that. That should be my philosophy of education: farm camp fun. Period.

Now, I have a question for the reader. Would you please, pause for a moment, and try and remember a time when a kid made you think of something in an entirely new way? Or surprised, inspired or challenged you?

The one that I think of first was a simple, silly interaction that happened in my first summer at farm camp. One little boy was wearing his shoes on the wrong feet. I said something like "your shoes are on wrong, silly!" And he looked up at me and said "I know." "Well here, let me help you fix them" "I don't want you to!" "but they are on wrong" "why?" "because that's not how they are supposed to be- that's just the way it is" "but why? I like them that way!" Here I sort of paused and had this mini epiphany in which a million new thoughts burst into my brain. I smiled and said "you're right, I'm sorry. Wear them however you want" and he trotted off, leaving me pondering...why do we follow these arbitrary rules of society anyway? Who even made them? If he wants to wear his shoes the "wrong" way, why the hell can't he? Who am I to tell him he is wrong? Who decided that was wrong anyway, and why do I believe it? He was questioning the very things that I could not even see. This was the first time I ever thought, are kids more brilliant than adults?

In one TI meeting that I had with Nick, when he said, do you know why you want to work with young kids? And I said something like, "They are just better, better than adults!" "Why?" "Because...they haven't been corrupted by adulthood! They have wonder still!" Wonder that I learned to love and appreciate through my muddy summers at Terra Firma. I have believed that kids are better than adults since I was a teenager. I have been aware that most of the rest of society may not agree with these thoughts, but I never knew that there was even an official term for this type of belief until this fall at Western, in Professor Hayes' class. I am sure that many of us have heard of some of the "isms": racism, sexism, classism, etc. This was a new one for me: adultism. This is defined as the the systematic mistreatment and disrespect of young people, or the assumption in society that adults are better than young people. Some go as far as to say that youth are actively discriminated against- for example they cannot legally make their own decisions until they are 18 years old, they cannot vote, they do not have any say in the legislations and rules created to control them, they are expected to conform to the rules set up for them by adults, and if they break those rules or push back, they are punished (Bell, n.d.). Are these not basic rights that are being denied to a whole group of people? I had never thought of the hierarchies our society has set up like this before. It is natural for adults to do though- I am sure we have all said things like "you're too young to understand that," "you're so smart for an 8 year old!," or "do as you're told!" These are things that we all say without second thought, but are all examples of adultist ways of thinking and speaking. There are even whole sets of studies around the recent phenomenon of ephebiphobia, or the fear of youth. Adults are fearing the rebellion of the young, especially in the teenage age group (Fletcher, 2018). What does this say about our society, that we fear our youth? Does not the oppressor always live in fear of the rebellion of the oppressed?

A very humbling example of adultism being exposed for me happened this summer, when I was given the incredible gift of the leadership track with CSLA, Concrete Summer Learning Adventures. For those of you who are unfamiliar, Concrete is about an hour west of Lake Diablo down Highway 20, and is an extremely impoverished town and school district. CSLA is a summer camp run out of the high school and is a partnership between the school district, United General Hospital, North Cascades Institute, and the National Park Service. I rolled up to CSLA all confident and ready to teach these kids all about environmental education, with all these lesson plans and a whole curriculum set up, operating under a huge set of assumptions that what I had to teach was important, and of value and interest to them because it was an interest to me. Here I was a Masters student about to impart my knowledge, blah blah blah. Well, I met the group of middle school kids that I was going to spend the next 4 weeks with, and it was a huge wake up call, smack in the face. After only a few days, I was completely reeling. Every single one of my assumptions was promptly unraveled. After the second week, as part of a reflection assignment, I wrote:

July 2017

*Blood on my hands, sweat in my eyes,
every muscle in my body screaming at me to stop.
But I clench my teeth, and pull harder.
This, I think, is grit.
The muscles in my chest
slowly knit themselves back together. I am shaking.
This, I think, is pain.
A relationship is ended suddenly, leaving me reeling,
and everything around me and inside me
is tinged purple for months.
This, I think, is heartbreak.
I have been alive 24 years,
but in the past 8 days,
I have been proven completely and utterly wrong
on all these fronts, and more.*

Grit is when

*you have a restraining order against your father
and, at 11 years old, must take care of your siblings
because your mother can't get out of bed.
But you still come to camp every day
with a smile.*

Pain is when

*you get a third degree burn on your hand
and in the same night, fall down the stairs
trying to escape your screaming father.
Come into camp with bruised elbows and blistered skin,
confused that we are worried- because nobody at home
even noticed.*

And heartbreak?

*When you live in a world where you truly believe
nobody cares about you.
When a leader raises their voice at you for something small,
and you get triggered by fear and run,
for running away is all you know how to do.*

*Few times has my heart ever ached so much
as that day I caught up to my camper,
his little frame slouched, eyes on the ground.
So broken.*

Whats wrong? I asked, breathless.

You can't run away like that, it terrifies me.

Why? he asked. Why do you care?

Nobody cares about me.

*No amount of pedagogical training or lesson planning
could ever prepare anyone
for a moment like that.*

*My kids present me with many such moments, every day.
I am among those whose life
has been blessed enough to have such naive definitions of
grit, pain, and heartbreak.
My kids get bigger doses of these on the daily,
have been through more in their short 10 or 12 years
then I have in my whole life.*

*I am humbled.
I learn so much, every day.
I struggle. I listen.
I throw all expectations out the window.
It's impossible to plan for what comes up each day.
How can I possibly help them?
All I can do is try my very best
to make them feel truly cared about.
To make them laugh, to fill them with wonder.
To give them a safe, fun place to be,
to see the heavy weights lift off their little shoulders
and just be kids, for once,
even if its just for a few hours.*

*My kids break my heart, every day.
They challenge me. Frustrate the hell out of me.
Surprise me. Exhaust me.
Constantly teach me new definitions of
grit, and pain.
But also, joy.
They fill me up with happiness.
Their stories, their games, their wisdom.
Their smiles, and silliness, and laughter.
Still smiling. I've rarely seen such strength.
I am in awe.
It is so. Hard.
But so worth it.
These are truly incredible people
that I get to spend my summer with, and I am grateful for
every single second of it.*

During my experience with this group of young people, I learned a huge amount not only as an educator, but as a person. Certainly, it exposed all the fallacies that people

believe about adults being wiser, smarter, tougher than kids. It made me completely rethink the idea of an educator as an 'impartor of knowledge' that students should do right to listen to- which is how many educators operate. Like many of my own teachers and professors during college, I entered that space assuming that I knew more than them, assuming that they wanted to hear what I had to tell them, assuming that all my education gave me the right to be in charge and tell them what they should know and learn. Well, a kid who doesn't know where their next meal will come from could care less that you have a fancy lesson plan about soil types. That is all adultism talking. At CSLA, I got a quick and dirty crash course that being a good educator does not mean imparting knowledge. Being a good educator means, quite simply, being a good person. Meeting your students where they are at- and listening to them. They all have far more wisdom than you will ever know.

Now, I struggle to accept adultism fully. I think that there is a tension between what we expect and need from kids- that they listen, that we can keep them safe, etc. So as a parent or educator, at what point does simple care for children that is needed from adults overlap into adultism? If I am liable for the safety of a group of people, there needs to be rules set in place that are followed. I am aware that these views are contradictory, but I have also yet to learn a way to keep 8 seven year olds on skis all safely in one group on a ski hill in a blizzard without being an authoritative figure who expects and needs to be listened to. These are the types of questions that we must always grapple with in this work.

One of the most drastic examples of adultism is in our school systems. In schools, children are literally forced to sit in one place in rooms all day while adults who fully believe they are better than them tell them what to do, tell them what to learn, and tell them how to behave. Knowledge that adults have decided is worth knowing, delivered in manners that adults have decided are the most effective. This is just the way it is; nobody questions this system. But I am beginning to ask more and more: why is nobody asking the students? Why are their voices not heard in a system that is theoretically set up for their benefit?

One of the ideas I have been thinking a lot around in this past year is that of play. This once again returns to my farm camp fun roots: farm camp wasn't fun because it was full of rules and knowledge that was forced upon kids, it was fun because it was full of play, of wonder, of exploration and learning in a very organic way, led by the kids and wherever their imagination and curiosity took them. This is why I think they are better than adults- because of their natural ability to play, which adults lack. Kids are not afraid to be silly, ask questions, explore, have wonder- adults lack these skills because we have been socialized to conform to the norms of an adultist society. One of the things that I find so illuminating about hanging out with kids is that they are always reminding us to laugh and reimagine. Play and wonder are good! These are the things that I love and value- however, this is the opposite of what happens in many school systems.

I understand the importance of play to the kids that I work with and to myself, but I was curious if there was greater proof, so I did some investigation. I found a surprising

amount of evidence supporting the importance of play. Research from The American Academy of Pediatrics states “Play is essential to the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical wellbeing of children beginning in early childhood. It is a natural tool for children to develop resiliency as they learn to cooperate, overcome challenges, and negotiate with others. It allows children to develop creativity and imagination while developing physical, cognitive, and emotional strengths” (Ginsburg et al., 2006). The US Play Coalition brings attention to “Landmark research by Piaget and Inhelder (1969) indicated emotional development and a positive self- concept are fostered through positive play experiences that allow children to feel successful and capable. Stimulating play environments facilitate progress to higher levels of thought throughout childhood, and self-esteem grows and is nurtured through successful social interactions with peers and adults in play situations. Positive measures of self-esteem and self-worth contribute to students’ success in school at both the academic and social levels.” (Stegelin et al., 2015). In short, play is a vital part of the successful, healthy development of kids.

The importance of play is clear. However, in the past decade or so, there has been a huge push in our school systems toward increased standardization. Policies such as No Child Left Behind have created a huge amount of pressure on teachers and school districts to teach to the standardized tests created by corporations, on the grounds that if schools do not pass the tests, they will lose funding. This pressure has led to school systems cutting programs such as the arts, PE, and recess. Even early education has become increasingly more academic and less play based (Ginsburg et al., 2006).

This quarter, I have had the incredible opportunity of taking Education for Social Justice with the beautiful Dr. Veronica Velez, and therefore I cannot continue without addressing the fact that the school system and standardized testing system are based directly upon the perpetuation of inequities and injustices of race and class in this country. These are facts that the dominant narratives in our society would have most of us socialized to not even notice or believe- because schools are nothing more than capitalistic industrialized systems designed to reproduce the social hierarchies this nation is based upon. I will not delve more into these complexities here- however, I will say that standardized testing is without a doubt taking play away from children. This coupled with the increased technology use resulting in constant stimulation and entertainment output with little to no effort input means that our schools and our society are literally teaching the natural wonder out of children.

One of the most troubling results of all this for me that I came across during my research is that these issues are disproportionately affecting children who live in poverty. According once again to The American Academy of Pediatrics, over 15 million children under the age of 18 live in poverty in the US. Poor school districts are already underfunded and as a result already at a disadvantage under the pressure of standardized testing. They are therefore often the first places to cut arts, PE, and recess programs. Children in these communities experience disparities in education, health care, and socioeconomic resources, and are also more likely to be deprived of the benefits of

safe and creative playtime and access to age-appropriate extracurricular activities. Parents have less time and resources, and there are fewer safe places to play (Milteer et al., 2012). When I read things like this my mind immediately travels to my CSLA kids. Children born into these situations are already at a disadvantage financially and emotionally, and now the school systems and community realities are depriving them of developmentally important time and space? The inequities keep stacking up on these young people and the weight of that unfairness is so heavy on those small shoulders, it is hard not to despair.

*and here I stand
weightless of all those burdens
born into the benefits of the very systems beating this little one down.
We think we have the right to be "above" them?
And we think we have more knowledge, and wisdom?
Who the hell am I,
What can I possibly say
to make this right
nothing
to those rightfully defiant young eyes.*

One of the best parts of CSLA was the ability I had to create a space where, for once in their lives, these kids could actually be kids. One of the results of decreased play and increased technology and academia in school systems is that effective teachers are literally having to scaffold play experiences for their students (Stegelin et al., 2015). Kids do not know how to naturally play anymore- they are rarely given those opportunities, especially in impoverished communities. At camp, the greatest gift we had to offer for those kids was the ability to feel safe in their smiles. Is this my calling? Farm camp fun and a childhood outside and bitterness with my own academia have led me to this? The ability to bring spaces of play to children who need it? And, don't all children need it? Either the allowance to just be kids in a certain space, or the literal unplugging in order to engage in real time and imagine? As Nick once asked me, is nature just my preferred setting? Where I crave and create connection with the young people I would so much rather spend time with than boring adults?

As you may have noticed, my time in this graduate program has been full of unknowns and uncertainties. I myself am many identities. At the beginning of this, Nick introduced me in three different ways. This is Becky, she is a cashier. This is Becky, she is a ski instructor. This is Becky, she is a graduate student. I would suspect that all three of those introductions created a whole set of assumptions around who I am and what I do and what kind of person I am. But I am all three of those things, simultaneously. I have realized that we do not need to define ourselves in boxes, or expectations, or assumptions- I am all three of those things and more, because that is what makes me feel whole. I want to bring that wholeness to my students because that is what they deserve, and I want them to know that I see them as whole as well. I have journeyed here through

privilege, farms and laughter, terrible lab reports, skiing pow and epiphanies. I am called to this work through it all.

So. Here I am, about to graduate with a Masters in Education, and I am sitting among many heavy contradictions. How do I wrestle with my bitterness with academia and my newfound understandings of some of the fallacies of higher education when I am in fact the very product poster child beneficiary of these systems? How can a person who understands this, who is bitter with schooling and academia, be a teacher, who promotes education and schooling? How do I navigate those conversations around higher education, privilege, justice, and jobs with my peers who have not traveled through these systems and still believe the myth of meritocracy and “intelligence” that I too believed for almost my whole life? How will I carry this privilege of a Masters into my future, when there are so many pressures and expectations of what I should do, based on all these assumptive narratives everyone in my life believes, but that my degree has actually taught me to no longer believe in? What is the balance between safety and order and what we expect from students, and adultism? How do we encourage play in a standardized world, how do we stand up for what we believe in while also protecting job security, how, as educators, do we navigate all this?

I do not have answers to these questions. This work is all about living contradictions, learning always, and constantly having more questions. Basically, I want to use the privilege of this graduate degree that I feel somewhat conflicted and guilty about for good: I want to spend the rest of my life with kids, every day, in whatever format that will look like. This is because it is easy to get bogged down in huge problems, in things we do not know, in tensions and contradictions. Our society is adultist, discounting the inherent wisdom of our young, exemplified in how adults are systematically taking away the essence of play by standardizing the lives of children. Our planet is dying, wars are raging, the political world is in upheaval, our school system is industrialized to perpetuate the hierarchies of an unjust society, and the inequities are stacking up high. But, we must not focus on despair. What we should be doing is asking: how are we going to disrupt these systems? Vero once said in class, “I fundamentally believe that the most powerful place to be a revolutionary is to become a teacher...because only teachers can revolutionize ideologies.”

And what *I* am asking is, why are we relying on *adults* to fix these systems?

After all, we have established already that kids are smarter than adults. Jeffrey Duncan- Andrade (2009) writes: “young people who emerge in defiance of socially toxic environments are roses that grow from concrete” ...and as teachers, our job is to help students find cracks.

Kids are going to be the ones who better this world. They are the ones who have the ability to think outside these systems, who can ask critical questions like why shoes need to be worn that way, who can see things that we have been socialized to be blind to. But schools and society and adultism are hell bent on squashing this brilliance out of them so that they become boring and square, like us. As an educator, it will be my role, my life’s

work, to help kids continue to ask critical questions, realize their brilliant potential, to help guide them to their already inherent greatness. As the brilliant young writer and speaker Adora Svitak (2010) says in her TED Talk:

In many ways our audacity to imagine helps push the boundaries of possibility...kids don't think about the limitations about how hard it can be, they just think about good ideas....No matter your position or place in life, it is imperative to create opportunities for children, so that we can grow up to blow you away...you need to listen and learn from kids, and trust us and expect more from us...we are the ones who will bring this world forward.

For me, this is more than enough reason to work within and for the oppressive systems I do not necessarily believe in: to also work against them. "In order to create change, we need teachers who think outside of the box, who are inspiring kids to be dreamers."

*I want to be that teacher.
I want to have farm camp fun,
and play!
I will recognize their wisdom
 in their souls and their eyes,
 for you know it is children
 who always take us by surprise.
I will bolster ideas,
hear all their voices,
for only they can solve the
world's toughest choices.
 I will build connection,
foster inclusion
celebrate their natural wonder,
encourage their questions that all together
 will be louder than thunder.
Injustices cause concrete
so thick a societal scheme,
I will provide resources and belief
in the courage to dream.

What better goal, what stronger hope ray,
then a life dedicated to
guiding children along their paths?
To becoming roses.
 I will fight, every day.*

And so it was that as many little muddy hands slipped into mine and happy faces smiled up at me, I fell in love with education. Thank you.

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A handwritten logo consisting of the letters 'S2SS' in a cursive, stylized font. The logo is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page and is overlaid on a light blue diamond-shaped background.

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