Reviewer A:

I enjoyed reading this paper which documents three years of a collaborative

school/university project focusing on the outdoors and using interesting

pedagogies with a focus on emotional engagement. While the story is worth

publishing and deserving of a wide audience, it’s not best placed in CJEE

I’m afraid so I would suggest that it be submitted to a

professional/practitioner journal.

The authors’ interests and commitment to exploring pedagogies promoting

emotional and bodily engagement with the outdoors runs strongly through the

paper. I recall reading about Reggio Emilia schools some years ago and was

aware that they still existed. The approach seems very sensible and the

authors provide some support for it from the limited research on learning

available from neuroscience studies.

The description of the experience of working with three schools shows

interesting developments although there isn’t enough detail about what

activities were designed and carried out. Over the three years of the project a great many and variety of activities were designed and implemented – most of which (in various iterations) would be taken as given activities in OEE. For this reason, and because details of activities might be more appropriate in a professional / practitioner journal, and because our focus was on the emotionality of learning stories, - we did not provide details. However, to give some sense of the types of activities that were undertaken, we have briefly included as an Endnote a description of “Building a Beaver Dam”.

The context of the three schools

varies considerably so one wonders how much of the progression is due to the

authors’ deepening understanding (their learning path), the school

management, the socio-economic status of the students, the teacher

turn-over, etc. We recognize most certainly that the contextual variation of the three schools would impact our work with them, however, the manuscript has been revised to focus more on the evolution of our understanding of learning stories and emotionality, with less attention given to the differences in the schools. We believe that our thoughtful and careful consideration of how we learned to use learning stories for documentation largely overrides the individual schools’ circumstances.

At the end, though, while there is some data provided and examined in

interesting ways, there isn’t enough insight or development of theory to

make it worthy of publication in CJEE. My feeling is that the neuroscience

section is redundant since it’s only used to justify the value of

emotional engagement with learning and I think many of us would take that as

a given. The problem, as we see it, with taking emotional engagement as a given in the learning process, is that it becomes tacit and undervalued, so teachers don’t attend to emotions with the attention they give to cognition. For this reason, and because Pert’s work physiologically connects the body-mind to learning, we would choose to keep the neuroscience section in the manuscript. The authors may wish to consider beefing up the research angle but

in that case perhaps the three cases become a context for a larger study

based on what they’ve learned. The study might form the basis of an

application for a SSHRC award.

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Reviewer B:

This paper was fascinating to read and well written. I’d encourage the

authors to write a book about their experience with E4E as there is so much

in here to be explored that can’t be done in one article. I really like

the focus on emotion and learning stories in particular as both are such a

great compliment to environmental/outdoor learning and yet so often

undervalued. Nice and thorough background description of Reggio, works

really well to situate the reader in the context of the teaching/learning

philosophy. Excellent use of the literature to support claims here. Initial

sections very well laid out; writing is clear and easy to follow.

Thank you for these kind comments.

My main recommendation is to try to simplify things further. There are a lot

of stories being told here, the context behind E4E, the importance of

emotion in learning, what learning stories are and their importance, your

learnings from E4E, the background literature…it could form a book! Really

focus in on emotion and learning stories for the purpose of this article,

you do a good job of this up to page 8, when you add in the context of E4E

and lots of other stories emerge out of this. My suggestion is to go through

your summaries of the years starting on p. 8 and make sure that that you are

briefly summarizing the project and then clearly and briefly summarizing

what you learned about learning stories and emotion through that year.

Thank you for your suggestion to simplify and focus on learning stories and emotionality. We found it difficult to cut pieces from the manuscript, since for us these are integral parts of the story, however, we have removed the portions that dealt with organizational issues, (directing readers to a different published paper for that info), and have tried to (re)write brief summaries for each school, focusing on learning stories and emotion. We have also added brief comments relating to our own emotions as we worked through the project.

The next section that needs revising is ‘Comparison of the data from three

documents’. As it stands, it is unclear why you are addressing the first

three perspectives that you list as: (1) the focus or intentionality of the

document; 2) the layout / presentation or visual elements; 3) the voices

that speak from the page). This is the first as a reader that we’ve heard

of these elements so why introduce them now? How are they connected to your

main thesis of the importance of emotion within the learning story format?

Be more explicit or cut them out entirely as they make the section hard to

follow. The comparison across years and contexts here also adds too much.

Try to simply focus on what you learned about emotionality and learning

stories across these years and contexts (your analysis summary does a nice

job of this so perhaps it can take the place of the confusing cross

comparison).

Yes, we can see how this might be confusing and seem extraneous to the manuscript. However, we felt strongly that we needed some way to formally compare the final reports, and consequently we needed to clearly present criteria for that purpose. Thus, we have established at the outset of the analysis, a list of criteria that are key characteristics of learning stories (as found in the literature). We removed the comparison text, and instead compare the three reports against these criteria in Table 1, again with a focus on elements of the learning story and emotionality. We think/hope this is less confusing for the reader, while still providing an overview of how our thinking and our work changed over the three years.

You have a lovely and clear conclusion so I’d re-read this and then see if

you can clearly set up the comparison section so that it ties directly to

the results that you present at the end. I’d also like to hear more of

your own emotional experience of creating the learning stories in this

section to underscore your thesis. Yes, thank you for this suggestion. We have included a paragraph in the Conclusions in which we identify a number of our emotions as we worked through the project. I’m really curious about this idea of

positive and negative emotions and what gets promoted within education and

why-another article for you to write in the future perhaps! : )

Really appreciated the cautionary note at the bottom of p. 19, that being

said, I think the article goes a long way in showing the value of learning

stories and think it will provoke some teachers into seriously considering

it as an approach so thanks for offering this to the field! Thank you, we hope so.

Minor Recommendations

p.1 “The first is the use of the learning story as an appropriate and

efficient way to document OEE teaching and learning”  I think it’s

important here to note at what grade levels here, a common misconception of

learning stories in that they only work for ECE so it would be valuable to

point out what grades/ages you worked with here.

We have added a sentence in the introduction stating that we discovered learning stories were useful in the junior and intermediate grades, and in the Lit Review we added a brief piece to address learning stories being used beyond the primary grades where they originated.

p.2 “We consider this paper our learning story.” Careful here if you

make this claim then those familiar with pedagogical narrations will be

hoping you play with form ie. that you will summarize your learning, add in

quotes, images, reflections, outside observations of learning akin to

typical learning story approaches. I think you can play with form here and

encourage you to do so, making sure that the emotion that is so valuable in

your findings is also highlighted and present in your writing.

Thank you for this point. We have taken the direct claim out of the manuscript that this is our learning story, since we have not formally treated it as such. However, we have mentioned our emotional responses in two places in the Analysis, and then included in the Conclusion a paragraph that *supposes if we were to write a learning story*, which emotions and events we might include.

p.4 “The learning story must provide rich and interconnected data that

will lead to reflection and further discussion. A learning story should be a

display - one that can be viewed, discussed, analyzed and theorized, and

potentially elicit emotional responses.” Elaborate on ‘why’ here, what

is the importance of this type of display and interconnection, really drive

it home for the reader so they can see the value. We have included a paragraph speaking to the value of the discussion. Would also encourage you

here at the end of your contextualizing within the literature, to briefly

speak to some of the critiques of learning stories and either briefly

address these or use the rest of the paper to help counter them. This helps

the literature review become more balanced. We have included a paragraph speaking to criticisms of learning stories.

p.7 “Positive emotions seem to support broader attention focusing and

cognition, whereas negative emotions tend to decrease cognition (Fredrickson

& Branigan, 2005).” This makes me wonder what is classified as a

‘negative’ emotion and why. I get worried that if we label things such

as sadness or frustration negative and then use the above science to teach

away from negative emotions that they will be seen as something one should

not express or allow for. Agreed, and have added a few words to address this, however to really delve into the categorization of emotions is almost another paper.

p.7 “As Sylvester points out: “By separating emotion from logic and

reason in the classroom, we’ve simplified school management and

evaluation,” (p. 75) but in so doing, we effectively handicap the complex

and powerful bodybrain through which lasting learning occurs.” Elaborate a

bit more here as this is such an integral point in the paper. Tell us more

briefly about why we’ve separated emotion away from teaching/learning. Is

this true at all age levels? Also important here to emphasize the western

cultural context of this approach. Again, it would be almost another paper to tackle the systemic legacy of Western dualism in education (a nod to Descartes) and difficult to be brief…however have added a couple of sentences to unpack this just a little.

p.8 “We came to our understandings of learning stories through an OEE

research project, titled E4E (Educating for Environment), in which we

partnered with our local public school board to plan and deliver OEE

teaching and learning in local schools.” Unclear what the research project

was here, elaborate. We think that the project is clearly explained in the section that follows: The E4E Project.

p.13 “Certainly our previous two years had taught us a great deal about

the creation and use of learning stories, and we strongly encouraged our

facilitators to join us in having a camera or iPad always at hand to observe

and record the students’ learning moments.” Curious as to what the

reaction was for teachers new to learning stories, from my experience, this

type of documentation is considered an ‘add-on’ and teachers can be

resistant as it seems like extra work, did you encounter this type of

response and how did you respond? We did not require participating teachers in the project to document, but we did request that our facilitators do so in the third year – and they encountered difficulties because it was a new strategy for them and they lacked the skill set to recognize AND record learning. We have spoken to this with additional writing in the section.

p.21 “Knowledge acquisition and emotional responses are a package deal.

Joy and wonder do not stand in the way of learning but strengthen and

support learning; this is consistently confirmed through OEE experiences,

and corroborated by the neurosciences. We need to value emotion as an

integral part of the teaching and learning package.” Why the focus on joy

and wonder here alone? Important to emphasize how other emotions can

support/hinder learning as well.

Agreed. We have revised the proposition to include and value a wide range of emotions.

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