Book reviews

School Scandals: Blowing the Whistle on the Corruption of Our Education System

Pat Thompson, Policy Press/Bristol University Press, 2020.

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Professor of Education and sometimes contributor to *FORUM* journal, Patricia (Pat) Thomson has written a book that progressive educators have long yearned for. Previously a headteacher and senior public servant in the Australian school system, Thomson is an active blogger at www.patthomson.net. Few people could therefore be better placed to write this much-needed book.

The book's core contention is that 'if economistic logics of calculation and competition are the basis for the organisation of public sector efficiency and effectiveness then, contra the rhetoric, particular and "bad" inefficiencies, ineffectiveness and inequities can result' (p4). England, we're told, represents 'an almost fully materialised case of economistic logics at work in schooling' (ibid.). And regarding the claimed redistributive and social-mobility aspects of the schooling system, Thomson contends that the current 'policy regime produces the very antithesis of what it claims to promote' (p5).

School Scandals highlights the 'corruption and corrupted practices', and the 'fraud, lack of transparency, cronyism and spin' that lie at the heart of the governance and administrative philosophy of the modern British state, under whose neo-liberal regimes privatisation and 'outsourcing' have relentlessly displaced public-service provision. She quotes the OECD as asserting that 'the ethical cost of corruption is higher in education than for any other public service' – hence the key importance of this book (pp6-7).

Written pre-pandemic, the book nonetheless get readers up-to-speed with the shenanigans that have occurred during lockdown – e.g. around free school meals and laptops for the disadvantaged; and in the light of Covid-19, the book's arguments are surely more relevant than ever – with Thomson arguing for a restructuring of the public services and a 're-moralisation' of government so that public resources can better and more equitably serve the population.

Unusually and refreshingly, the book is dedicated to 'education journalists … who persist in investigation' – and we're told (pp5-6) that the media are often *the only* source of information for a range of events in education. Thomson has been collecting media reports of corruption in England's schooling system for some years – amassing an extraordinary 3800 items in just six years.

At the core of the book are concerns for justice, equity and equality in the schooling

system. In explicitly naming the state's neo-liberalist agenda, Thomson interrogates 'interconnections and negotiations between the public and private, and who benefits' (p3). The book proposes 'arenas for action', drawing widely on the literatures in politics, public administration and organisation studies as well as in education. Is the long list of scandals Thomson presents a function of the reprehensible behaviour by a few individuals, or is it symptomatic of more *systemic* problems intrinsic to the system itself? For Thomson, 'the vast majority of civil servants and professionals … act ethically and work long and hard to ensure that schools … work in the public interest' (p6); so for her, it's the ever-deepening penetration of structural marketisation into England's schooling system that is responsible for the malaise and the corruption that she compellingly identifies.

Each of the nine chapters is introduced by appropriate media/press headlines, followed by a brief introduction to a key concept or text, chosen to illuminate the subsequent discussion. In Chapter 1, Thomson makes a distinction between corruption proper and 'corrupted practice', the latter defined as 'organisational structures, rules, relations, tools and routines which are arguably not in the public interest – wast[ing] public resources and work[ing] against the ideal of a fairer and more equal society' (pp12-13). Yet changing the latter is difficult, as 'the sites of corrupted practice [are] enmeshed within wider global networks' (p13).

Chapters 2 and 3 establish the historical and contemporary context, looking respectively at England's local authority-based national schooling system and its undermining by neo-liberal ideology; and the nature of the public sector, focusing on how the funder-purchaser-provider (FPP) infrastructure system has enabled the development of a marketised academy-based system. Under neo-liberalism, new forms of governance emerge, with new quangos at arm's length from government, and which are crucially 'not open to public consultation or scrutiny, let alone public involvement in decision making' (p30), with little space for any debate about policy-making. And the prevailing audit culture managerialism and 'New Public Management' demand that 'evaluative measurements are used to pit one service against another' (p29), with 'calculative technologies provid[ing] an apparently objective basis for decision making, [with] contextual and "social" matters … ruled out' (p31). Thomson is also careful to point out that academisation was an already deeply engrained phenomenon under New Labour – though only 203 academies were in existence when the Conservative coalition government gained power in 2010 (p75).

However, the new education secretary Michael Gove was infamously trying to gear up the civil service for academising *all* of England's schools. We are also told how the now-prevailing funder-purchaser-provider model 'relies on arms-length bodies with little or no public involvement' (p65) – Ofsted being a notable example. Here we see the direct anti-democratic results of the public sector becoming colonised by marketisation

ideology and practices, with 'local engagement and participation not usually [being] the case with the marketised FPP model', with functions that were previously open and public now effectively or actually privatised (p65), and with 'the public effectively removed from decision making about matters of public concern' (ibid.). Chapters 4 through to 7 go into the consequences of this lack of democratic oversight.

Having shown in Chapter 3 points at which corruption might occur in the current 'muddled' system (e.g. with civil-service marketisation corrupting the public-service ethos), Chapters 4 and 5 then focus on efficiency, with Chapter 4 delving into the cost of academy start-up and conversion/re-brokerage, and the cost of private finance initiatives (PFIs). We read, for example, that 'in May 2017, *Schools Week* claimed that leaked emails showed that the academies minister had asked the DfE to present figures in a way that might obscure high re-brokerage costs' (p83; see also p84) – ideologically driven policy-making par excellence, with little to do with either efficiency or evidence.

Incredibly, nowhere has there been any attempt by government to estimate the actual cost of morphing England's education system into a quasi-marketised schooling system – again, strongly suggesting ideological rather than evidence-based motivation (p70). Thus, 'it is almost impossible to judge the efficiency, and value for money, of the changes [that have been made]' (p71). One *Guardian* headline perhaps encapsulates these concerns: 'Are academies just a ludicrously expensive con-trick?' (*The Guardian*, 1 December 2009). For Thomson: 'Markets are a waste-producing model – wasteful of effort, and wasteful of money' (p115).

Both academy 're-brokerage' (pp82-5) and the highly controversial PFI come in for searching analysis (pp85-9), as does the consultancy gravy train (pp90-1). In January 2018, we're told, the National Audit Office reported that annual charges for the existing 700-odd PFIs and PF2s amounted to over £10 billion in 2016-17, with total built-in costs up to the 2040s amounting to an extraordinary £199 billion (p85). Moreover, the way in which these costs are accounted makes calculating value for money 'very difficult' (p86) – with PFI 'driven by belief rather than evidence' (ibid.).

Thomson pulls no punches: 'It is arguably … a dereliction of public duty to waste large sums of public money and to hide the extent of it. The responsibility for this lies directly with the elected governments who advocated and instituted FPP policies' (p93); and, 'there is widespread unease about private snouts in publicly funded troughs' (p113). Responsible stewardship of the public finances, anyone? In sum: 'Converting a school system … has in-built inefficiencies and has demonstrably been wasteful of time and money' (p119); and, 'reforming the school system has incurred significant cost, and contains ongoing elements that run counter to efficiency … a corruption of a public service that operates in the public interest' (p120).

Chapter 5 then looks at the business-mimicking practices of academies, like high leadership salaries (e.g. academy trust CEOs), financial reporting and mismanagement

(e.g. trusts having just collapsed, with large amounts of cash being written off), fraud and procurement malpractice, and market failure – and with 'repeated incidents of financial mismanagement and academy trusts in debt reported in the press' (p113).

Chapters 6 and 7 then look at the vexed question of school effectiveness – respectively, the nature of effectiveness measures and the distortions of 'teaching to the test', and its unintended 'shadow' impacts – lack of transparency, gaming the system (e.g. skewing student intake), exclusions and 'off-rolling', and toxic management practices.

Chapter 6 on school effectiveness foregrounds unreliable comparisons between schools – with the discussion on page 126 blowing out of the water any lingering credibility that the audit culture and league performance tables etc. might have: 'If effectiveness regimes are based on assumptions about a "level playing field" that does not exist, they are by nature unfair' (p131). The emperor's new clothes' nakedness of the audit culture's obsession with measurement is also detailed, completely failing to 'deliver' what it claims – i.e. accurate assessments of effectiveness that are objective, and which don't hopelessly distort the very system they're measuring via unintended side effects, changing what they're measuring by the very act of measuring it; playing the system; the superficiality of measurable indicators; the necessary ignoring of the unmeasurable – etc.

How the audit culture can continue to devastate the schooling system in the face of such critiques overwhelmingly suggests that these are *political and politicised* interventions that have little if any relationship to genuine educational quality. Why else would such devastating exposés of this totally inadequate system be completely ignored by politicians and policymakers?

The 'counter-productive consequences of school effectiveness measures' that Thomson examines (pp139-48) include changing behaviours, teaching to the test and policy tinkering. 'It takes a very brave school and school leader to stick to their educational philosophy in the face in a system espousing uniform and highly reductive approaches to effectiveness', she writes (p142); and we read of the toxic co-lateral impact of introducing the EBacc, with a shameful '35 per cent decline in arts subjects between from 2010 to 2018', and with 'arts and physical education … being studied less across the country' (p145). And on page 146 is a key point that deserves more attention in any concerted critique of the audit culture – that, 'attention to the easily observable takes time and attention away from other important matters, such as learning'. Equally important is that 'interventions intended to produce greater efficiency and effectiveness may in fact sometimes do the opposite' (p174).

'It is almost impossible to gauge how much gaming goes on' in the system, Thomson tells us (p158) – with gaming 'usually designed to maximise results and league table positions' (p159). Yet based on media reports, Thomson concludes that 'gaming is widespread and endemic in England's schools' (p160) – indicating in turn that 'England's

move to school choice and competition … is having perverse effects' (ibid.). At worst, and quoting Zygmunt Bauman, we end up with '"faceless" organisations in which human connections, encounters and accountabilities matter less than numbers and records' – with 'schools in toxic accountability cultures [being] desocialised' (p166). And regarding 'punitive top-down management' (p175), 'line managers may adopt highly coercive practices, seeking to control rather than empower, intimidate rather than coach and support … micromanage rather than delegate, and order and require rather than discuss and negotiate' (p167). Little wonder that in one report, 'a staggering 80 per cent of teachers have considered quitting in the last year [2018]' (p169).

'The poisonous combination of power imbalances between teachers and their leaders and a fearful environment' is also highlighted – eroding collegiality in schools and undermining both collective and individual wellbeing (p169), and the inevitable outcome of imposing a competitive marketised ideology – as Thomson writes later in the book, 'corrupted practices are the result of an economistic (calculating and competitive) logic materialised in the FPP [funder–purchaser–provider] organisational structure' (p174). Thomson by contrast advocates schools 'includ[ing] staff and students as well as governors and trustees in decision making' (p212).

Moreover, the impact of this toxic ethos cascades throughout the system and becomes normalised (p169): 'School leaders pass down to teachers the funder–purchaser demands for greater effectiveness and efficiency, because they too are subject to systemic intimidation, including public humiliation and losing their job if the school fails to deliver' (p170).

Chapters 8 and 9 look at the challenge of humanising this toxic school system, focusing on ethics, the public good and strategies for reform – codes of ethics, regulatory practices, and changing value systems in relation to the public good – and concluding that unless morality and integrity are directly addressed, mere technocratic tinkering will not be enough. Four possibilities are discussed for 'changing the economic rationalities' dominating the system (p174): changing the accountability regime; more and better regulation; structural change; and adopting a code of ethics. We read approvingly of Finnish educationalist Pasi Sahlberg's notion of 'intelligent accountability … with words such as trust, professionalism, respect and reciprocity [being] materialised in a high support, low punishment approach to schooling' (p176).

Thomson's proposal for more regulation (pp177-9) is a complex one that deserves a much longer discussion. There's certainly a significant view in the education world that party politics should be removed from education (e.g. see Ball et al., 2010) – e.g. 'we urge that schooling should be depoliticised. What happens in classrooms should no longer be micromanaged by Government' (ibid.).

Thomson does propose important changes, like banning related-party transactions and 'excessive salaries and benefits'. The cherry-picking of students would be stopped;

local authorities would be better-resourced to 'support schools to work together'; contracting-out would be reduced; academy trust boards and the deliberations of regional schools commissioners would be opened up to teachers, students and parents; open decision-making would be championed, and secrecy seen as morally wrong in publicly funded schools. Her conclusion about the public-good nature of education will be familiar to left economists – namely, education is a public good and not an individualised private commodity, with 'the public good [being] the moral foundation for reform', resulting in a 'school system with a renewed moral commitment to the public that it serves' (p191). One thing is clear: England's current schooling system is very far from being the kind of public-good system for which Thomson is strongly advocating.

The attention Thomson gives to Australia's Good Society Policy network is most welcome, maintaining that, for example:

- We live in a society, not an economy.
- We are citizens, not consumers.
- Government need to understand that trustworthiness creates social dividends. (Quoted on pp205-6.)

Henry Mintzberg's prophetic work critiquing the colonisation of the public sector by business values and practices is highlighted – e.g. in a 1993 interview: 'We've become prisoners of measurement: audits, league tables, targets. It just destroys creativity. I'm opposed to letting [measuring things] drive everything else out … in education and healthcare, it's absolutely devastating' (quoted on pp208-9). Thomson argues for an 'urgently needed' public commission for state-school education, bringing together 'all stakeholders at all scales of educational activity and school experience and foster[ing] a new sense of solidarity and trust in schooling' (p215).

I was surprised at how lightly Ofsted comes off in this book. Thomson writes that: 'Simple solutions like replacing Ofsted will simply arouse opposition' (p177). It's perhaps surprising that Thomson doesn't engage more with the emotional carnage that Ofsted has been wreaking in schools since the 1990s – e.g. Jeffrey and Woods (1996), research that surely needs replicating. Ofsted has grown into a massive and essentially unaccountable bureaucratic organisation that wields power in often draconian ways. I wonder whether Ofsted is seen as being so powerful, aggressively self-preserving and essentially untouchable that people see it as pointless even to imagine an accountability world beyond Ofsted.

I wish the 'audit culture' had been more explicitly named, with some reference to that culture's key critics like professors Michael Power and Marilyn Strathern; but its shortcomings are very well covered. Thus, under the Thatcher-Blair marketising of the civil service, civil servants were coached in the audit-culture practices of 'visible planning', benchmarking, targets, monitoring, performance-based reward and

punishment via so-called 'key performance indicators' – with the 'missionary rhetoric of delivery underpinn[ing] all interventions' (p60), with a 'new datafied civil servant mindset [being] produced and reproduced through performance and repetition' (p61).

We owe Pat Thomson an enormous debt for exposing the scandal that is England's shamelessly marketised schooling system. On any impartial analysis, the neo-liberal experiment with England's schooling system has been calamitous – Thomson: 'Competition and particular forms of calculation have warped and tainted the school system in England. The school system … is … suffering from the ill-effects of the last 30 years of neoliberalist reform. Its moral basis has been corrupted at policy level [and] in some schools' (p209).

In sum, *School Scandals* presents readers with an open goal for arguing that the marketisation and commodification of schooling have done huge damage to our schools, teachers and children – and that they have to go at the next political opportunity.

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Artscapers: Being and Becoming Creative. An Art-in-Education programme as part of University of Cambridge's North-West Cambridge Development

Paula Ayliffe, Ruth Sapsed, Esther Sayers and David Whitley, Cambridge: Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination., 2020.: CCI: http://cambridgecandi.org.uk

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At the end of World War II, Henry Morris, Cambridgeshire's chief education officer, appointed Nan Youngman to be county art adviser. Youngman was a painter who supported herself by teaching. Her ideas about the value of art in the lives of children were influenced by the thinking of Marion Richardson and Roger Fry. In her inspirational work for the county, and as chair of the Society for Education through Art, Youngman insisted that the opportunity to look at contemporary painting and sculpture, and to make art, were irreplaceable elements in a child's education.

Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination (CCI) stands in the tradition inaugurated by Morris and Youngman. CCI is a charity enabling artists to work for sustained periods in the region. Those involved with it share a belief in the power of art to enrich everyday experience and so help us become more fully ourselves. Curiosity and imagination, twin engines of art-making, are powers which also drive learning, if learning is understood in Deweyan terms as the continuous reconstruction of knowledge and experience.

For Youngman, the child's encounter with a contemporary art object was the seminal event. For those involved with CCI what matters is the encounter with a contemporary artist in an outdoor space. The aim is 'creative place-making … thoughtful engagement with the neighbourhoods we are working in … how the surroundings that are closest to us …can be opened up as spaces for curiosity and imagination' (p10). In its eighteen-year existence the charity has carried through a range of diverse projects along these lines with pupils, schools, families and communities.

ArtScapers: Being and Becoming Creative records and reflects on a project under way since 2016 between CCI, several local artists and three Cambridge primary schools. The venture is one element in a substantial public art programme sparked by the decision to develop university-owned land in north west Cambridge. Thousands of new homes, a new primary school, a community centre, shops and parks are being built. This major development substantially changes the local landscape, and re-names it. Whatever may be said for and against the development, it presents an opportunity for children to address a series of questions. How can art and the work of artists help children relate to their city as it grows? What role do artists play in the development of new places for living? How can creative action help children and adults navigate change? The ArtScapers programme offers a way to respond. It also stands as a critique of current education policies which exert remorseless pressure to define teaching as a species of

delivery, and learning as conformity and imitation.

The ArtScapers programme brings to the fore imagination and curiosity. It places these innate human powers in the service of children's education and celebrates what results. An eight-year-old explains: 'Being an ArtScaper means to look at something and make your own ideas. Then just think of the idea you thought of before and mix it up so you can make something even bigger and newer. Then just design it' (p23). Curiosity is the outward-moving gesture which prompts each of us to question and explore. For teachers, it is the desired first response to any encounter with curriculum content – the 'it' being taught – or to the invitation to learn about something. As for imagination, it is often lauded as the power to see the world otherwise, to conjure alternatives and new possibilities. And rightly so. But imagination is also the power which helps us see the world more abundantly as itself. Imagination takes us beyond surfaces and the immediate. It enables us to inhabit a situation. Our imagination puts us more completely within a context and its circumstances so we begin to know it better. For the novelist Italo Calvino, the imagination is *an instrument of knowledge, and participation in the truth of the world.* If curiosity prompts us outwards towards some aspect of the world which calls to us, imagination finds us there already. Imagination intuits likenesses, associations, connections and implications, and so helps us grasp complexity. It deepens awareness. If curiosity is the urge to look for meaning, imagination energises meaning-making.

The impulse propelling the ArtScapers programme is emancipatory. By recognising all children as curious and imaginative, the way is opened to recognise them also as capable, possessed of knowledge and the means to know more, and able to take a lead. In the words of *ArtScapers …*: 'Children show each other the way, with educators, artists and parents enabling the process by being open to the fresh ways of looking at the world that children's creative insights can generate' (p7).

Setting out minds

Three Cambridge primary schools have been involved in the programme. *ArtScapers …* focuses on Mayfield, a maintained two-form entry primary school in the north of the city. The publication charts the range of activities which have comprised the programme in the school over several years. These include one-off events and encounters, workshops, family days, web-based activities, and a plethora of outdoor learning designed to 'facilitate attentive and imaginative responses to the environment' (p17).

A singular quality of the ArtScapers programme is its capacity to awaken young people's attention and keep it awake. This doesn't happen purely by chance. To be successful, an ArtScaper activity must be planned and resourced as carefully and extensively as any other element of the educational offer made by the school and its teachers. Planning provides an opportunity to reconsider ways of working with place,

time, language, body and materials. One of the three artists involved in the project puts it like this:

> Much work and thought goes into developing paths of exploration that will help the children develop their innate ability to fathom and develop multi-perspectives on the world around them. We think carefully how to weave together the different expert voices involved – the environment, the children, their teachers, and the school culture … Finding the careful balance of listening to these voices requires a particular kind of attention, an 'empathic attention' (p17).

The plan for an ArtScaper activity won't resemble the plan for a classroom-based lesson. ArtScaper activities take place mostly outdoors and across spans of time whose duration and division is not determined by the exigencies of a school day. In school, that day is all too easily split into segments with pre-set outcomes predicated on notions of linear progress at a given pace. ArtScapers blaze a different trail. The ArtScapers programme cultivates children's imaginative responses for educational ends: it follows that it values and looks to harness the intrinsically educative power of play. By taking on a role or accepting the premises of a thought-experiment, children's imaginations are put to work. The detail and scope of what's done, and the ways it's done, then rest with the children. In one example described here, children visit the huge construction site where the new community of Eddington is beginning to be built. Children are asked to conceive of new structures made only by recycling parts of buildings which already exist. In another example, children explore the relationships between various objects found on the construction site. Then they stack and balance these materials into sculpture. In a third example, children walk through the landscape that is being changed and imagine the place from the point of view of its local fauna. How are animals affected when human structures intervene? This activity asks children 'to take on a larger imaginative vision of interdependent lives, which the distinctive qualities of the earth and surrounding buildings shaped' (p20). 'We set our minds to a newt', as one child puts it.

A characteristic ArtScaper activity will include imagining, attending, reflecting and 'mixing up' ideas, as well as working with materials to make art. Accompanying this process are many discussions among the children about what doesn't seem to be working as the art is made, and how setbacks and failures might best be overcome. A precept of the programme is to 'put the child in the position the artists face in forming creative responses to the work: to make the children … themselves artists, in an authentic way' (p20). So children are encouraged to consider how to add to or alter the work in order to improve it, rather than at once to reject it entirely and start again from scratch. In this way, criteria for success can be established or renegotiated by children themselves and their independent decision-making fostered.

Such an approach respects children's ownership of the work being made, which is

to say children's originality. And it does something more. It consolidates children as cultural agents. In the ArtScapers programme, the child is recognised as a maker of culture as well as a recipient of it. In this, the programme approaches most closely the stance taken by Youngman, Richardson and Fry, and distances itself furthest from the conception of the pupil in contemporary policy, a conception colonised by demands to benchmark, quantify and render each child down to data.

It is evident from the comments recorded in *ArtScapers* … that children value the scope given them to make their own decisions about what they do, to make mistakes and to rework without anxiety. They also value the embodied nature of activities. 'The best part was the walking …it kind of jogs our minds', said one (p25). Another said that the programme 'makes your brain adventurous' (p24). How's that for a learning objective?

Lest success appear too easily accomplished, the problems and difficulties that inevitably crop up are acknowledged. A pupil remarks: 'It can be fun but sometimes it's a bit dull because [when you are working outside of the classroom] you have to do something and a lot of the time it gets blown down or just sort of doesn't work or the materials aren't there for what you're thinking' (p25). Teachers note that certain classes can be over-exuberant outdoors, 'becoming excited and difficult to control' (p29).

Yet the risk inherent in approaches such as ArtScapers, where classroom norms of control are suspended, should be weighed against the educational benefits. Teachers on the project recognised that giving children scope to decide what can be done, and how, and with whom, fuelled engagement and motivation. Children developed more independence and self-confidence as learners. Conversations which arose among children as they created art and weighed up what would work or might work better, and why, revealed the beginnings of critical thinking. Opportunities for collaboration, and recognition of constructive divergence, helped consolidate the sense of the group – and the school – as a community of learners rather than a collection of atomised individuals each set on their own predictable trajectory. Children were seen to work more calmly and easily in 'a less overtly-structured, more open-ended learning environment' (p29). This suggests one benefit of 'slowliness' (p8), a coinage expressing the educational importance of licensing children to go at their own pace. To take the time they need to do what they have chosen. Extending to children this control over time would seem to help them look more intently and reflectively.

Learning to see

As might be expected, across the programme children grew especially interested in different facets of the natural world, noticing in greater detail and attending more closely to what they noticed. This in turn led to the sharing of knowledge about what was seen, and to further discussion. Teachers noted that: '[t]he movement from heightened

attention and interest through to a broader understanding and discussion was characteristic of the way the whole programme worked' (p30). The American bryologist and writer Robin Kimmerer suggests in her book *Gathering Moss* that putting into words what we have seen helps us see better: 'Look in a certain way and a whole new world can be revealed … Having words for these forms makes the differences between them so much more obvious. With words at your disposal, you can see more clearly. Finding the words is another step in learning to see' (pp 10-11).

The ArtScapers programme has encouraged heightened attention among staff, too. Activities offer teachers scope to observe individual children and groups more closely and in a wider range of situations than is possible in the classroom. Staff can watch processes of learning more meticulously and see new sides to children as learners. This in turn prompts the right words to be found for what has been seen. Every teacher at Mayfield spends an afternoon each week with their classes outside, rain or shine. The head teacher encourages staff to work alongside pupils on these occasions, rather than 'in front' of them. So the basis on which the teacher can understand, work with and assess each child is broadened and enriched.

ArtScapers: Being and Becoming Creative is freely available to read online. There's also a hard-copy version the size of a magazine or a small scrapbook. As well as written text of different colours and sizes, almost every page holds at least one photo or image. Individual lines of coloured print curve and weave around and between the regular-sized printed text. These lines are like overheard snippets of talk. They quote what children say, or highlight words and phrases of particular significance for the practice being described. They hook curiosity. The visual material illustrates activities described, places encountered and work produced. Photos bear witness to the effects on participants of these activities and by extension of the programme as a whole, capturing moments of decision, stillness, deep concentration or happiness. This visual material requires a different kind of reading from that called forth by the written text. Sometimes it required me to imagine I was in the picture. The busy appearance of pages worked to slow me down, productively. I could attend to each different kind of text on its own terms while playing with connections between them.

ArtScapers … briefly notes that news of the programme has begun to spread. Good! News should spread, not to proselytise or to profit but to attest to the enduring value of educational practice undertaken according to the principles informing this project, and to support what has been called 'creative activism' (see Hay et al. in *FORUM* 62/1, pp91-106). Such activism, and the carefully considered creative practice exemplified in this publication, share something in common with the moss studied by Professor Robin Kimmerer. Moss, when you look more closely, turns out to be mosses. Mosses live within their means and give more than they take. Tiny powerhouses of biodiversity, they endure. In due course they wear down the hardest rock to a handful of sand.

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