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Teaching Solitude: Sustainability and the Self, Community and Nature While Alone

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Research on the nature of schools has demonstrated the significance of relationships and dialogue in creating more inclusive learning communities. However, some children and adults report that they feel most included when left alone. This article sets out to consider aloneness in schools and, in particular, ways of encouraging and enabling healthy solitude and also to serve as stimulus for empirical research in schools. Implications for practice are included.

Keywords: solitude; curriculum; play; education

This article investigates the teaching of solitude, in response to research responses to the question "when do you feel most included, in school?". Two of the respondents, aged seven to eight, said in one way or another, "when I'm left alone, to work on my own" (Hatfield, 2004; Stern, 2009,

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p. 49). Those paradoxical statements were an initial stimulus to attention being given to being alone in school, both in negative forms (loneliness, as in Stern, 2013) and positive forms (described as positive forms of solitude). It is the latter issues that are considered in this article. Healthy solitude, as an alternative to loneliness and to boredom, can be taught through English lessons, languages, history, religious education, geography, citizenship, science, mathematics, computing, art, design and technology, music, physical education, and personal and social education. There are also organizational approaches, including developing spaces in schools — for pupils and students of all ages — for both solitude and togetherness, and encouraging a whole range of play from the more social to the more solitudinous. The challenge set is the extent to which it is right to say that, in schools, solitude is "the salt of personhood" (Sarton, 1974, para. 5). What is suggested in this article is that solitude is essential to the sustainability of a personhood that is, nevertheless, necessarily communal and dialogic. Schools can teach solitude and in so doing, can provide some of the education that is essential to personal, communal, and global sustainability (Speth, 2008, p. 215).

Solitude: My Sweetest Choice

Three accounts are presented of solitude that are — or at least seem to be — positive. They originate in 17th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and therefore tell us something of the richly ambiguous history of solitude itself and its relationship to loneliness. Loneliness is clearly a form of suffering, albeit having some positive value (see Moustakas & Moustakas, 2004). Solitude, in contrast, can include positive states, even when they are tinged with suffering. However, solitude is not *necessarily* positive. Whereas the theologian Tillich and the psychologist Galanaki presented solitude as contrasts to loneliness, to "express the glory of being alone" (Tillich, 2002, p. 5) or as "beneficial aloneness" (Galanaki, 2005, p. 128), others convincingly argued for a sense of solitude as encompassing both positive and negative aspects of aloneness (Koch, 1994, p. 33; Senechal, 2012, p. 154). The three examples given here are,

however, of positive solitude, and each is related to a kind of sustainability: First, emotional and creative sustainability through dialogue (with communal consequences); second, sustainability of nature; third, sustainability of personhood.

The first description offered of solitude is largely positive, as the solitude has been *chosen*. For the poem *O solitude, my sweetest choice* (http://www.jimandellen.org/womenspoetry/solitude.html), Katherine Philips (1631–1664) translated *La solitude* by Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant (1594–1661), and several verses of Philips's poem were set to music by Henry Purcell (1658/9–1695). It is in this form, as a song, that the words have remained popular (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5Bv3307x08). In Philips's (originally Saint-Amant's) remarkable poem, solitude is presented as the "sweetest choice" and as adored as teaching "Apollo's lore" (i.e., the art of poetry), even while it is hated as it hinders "seeing" and "serving" the lover to whom the poem is addressed. In Purcell's song, the lyrics appear to be addressed only to "solitude," and not to the lover. The full poem therefore explains why solitude is both adored and hated, adored for what can be learned (including learning about the lost lover), and hated for keeping the person away from the lover. In French, there is no linguistic distinction between what in English have become divergent meanings of "solitude" and "loneliness." (The French words "solitude" and "seul" can both be used to mean either "solitude" or "loneliness") (Lewis, 2009, p. 12; Rouner, 1998, p. 179). So an English translation of a French poem about solitude, written in the 17th century (when "lonely" was barely established in its modern English sense), provides plenty of room for interesting speculation. What it celebrates and clearly presents as calming and creative and at times joyous, is solitude itself: being on your own. The relationship and dialogue of the narrator is with the natural world but, indirectly and more importantly, it is with people (from times gone by, as well as more recent visitors and the narrator's lover), and with gods and mythical beings (demi-gods, Naiads, nymphs, Echo, Tritons).

That description of solitude promotes the value of sustaining oneself emotionally and creatively, through a solitudinous dialogue with others such as previous visitors to the place, the narrator's lover, and gods. Solitude can therefore support communal sustainability, by providing opportunities for dialogue with those who are not immediately present in traditionally "sociable" situations. A second description of positive solitude does address relationships, but is focused particularly on the relationship with nature. It is, significantly, also one of the central texts of political environmentalism, and therefore important in any discussion of sustainability. In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) wrote about the period of just over two years that he spent living in a cabin by Walden Pond, "in the woods, a mile from any neighbor" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 1). There, Thoreau (2006) said, he "earned [his] living by the labor of [his] hands alone" (p. 1). Accounts are given throughout the book of his way of life and his philosophy ("higher laws"), but central to this article are his complementary chapters on "solitude" and on "visitors." "My nearest neighbor is a mile distant," he says, and therefore "I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself" (Thoreau, 2006, pp. 140–141). Many readers are convinced of his isolation, encouraged by Thoreau's poetic hyperbole, such as saying that at night "there was never a traveller passed my house, or knocked at my door, more than if I were the first or last man" (p. 141). Yet Thoreau himself wrote a great deal of his sociability, saying "I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready enough to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way," and continuing "I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society" (p. 151).

Thoreau (2006) felt sociable while having fewer "trivial" visitors and more — or a higher proportion of — *significant* visitors. "I had withdrawn so far within the great ocean of solitude," he said, "that for the most part, so far as my needs were concerned, only the finest sediment was deposited around me" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 155). When Thoreau wrote of wilder places, such as Maine (further North in New

England and, then as now, much wilder than Massachusetts), he did not find that kind of solitude felicitous. His chosen solitude was therefore quite distinct from the "hanging mountains" chosen by Philips. His was not a *withdrawal* from sociability but a careful *editing* of it, allowing him the company of some people and, significantly, of the natural world. "I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object," he says, concluding that "[t]here can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 141). Sufficient solitude from people to allow for society and dialogue with the rest of nature was the choice Thoreau made. He achieved solitude by working in, and not simply by observing, nature.

Thoreau's (2006) sense of solitude as helping sustain a relationship with nature has influenced a great deal of environmental philosophy and action. *Walden* is one of the keystones in the development of theories of environmental, social, and communal sustainability. However, Thoreau added another form of solitude. The third form of solitude to be considered in this article, that of self-companionship, enables personal sustainability. Solitude from people allows for greater companionship with oneself, and is therefore a way of sustaining the self. "With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense," and therefore "I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 145). Solitude can help develop this healthy "doubleness," while at the same time, "[t]his doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 146). Human company, and even at times the companionship of the rest of nature, can distract a person from self-companionship, and "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 146). The self-companionship required of monastic orders is described in a similar way. In the 12th century, Cistercian Abbot William of St-Thierry (friend and biographer of the Benedictine St. Bernard) explained why a monastic cell is not the same as a prison cell. "[H]e with whom God is is never less alone than when he is alone," and:

> "He who lives with himself", William warns, "has only himself, such as he is, with him." Therefore "A bad man can never safely live with himself, because he lives with a bad man and no one is more harmful to him that he is to himself." (Webb, 2007, pp. 71–72)

That is such a simple explanation, and so important to Thoreau and later writers on positive versions of solitude. An example from the 20th century of solitude as a way of sustaining selfhood is that of Sarton (1973, 1974). She wrote of an acquaintance who found himself unexpectedly alone in New York and therefore visited galleries. "For him," she said, "it proved to be a shock nearly as great as falling in love to discover that he could enjoy himself so much alone" (Sarton, 1974, para. 1).

> What had he been afraid of, I asked myself? That, suddenly alone, he would discover that he bored himself, or that there was, quite simply, no self there to meet? But having taken the plunge, he is now on the brink of adventure; he is about to be launched into his own inner space, space as immense, unexplored, and sometimes frightening as outer space to the astronaut. (Sarton, 1974, para. 2)

"Solitude," Sarton (1974) said, "is the salt of personhood" as "[i]t brings out the authentic flavor of every experience" (para. 5). Like Thoreau, Sarton related the personhood that is enhanced by solitude to the perception of nature.

> It takes a while, as I watch the surf blowing up in fountains at the end of the field, but the moment comes when the world falls away, and the self emerges again from the deep unconscious, bringing back all I have recently experienced to be explored and slowly understood, when I can converse again with my hidden powers, and so grow, and so be renewed, till death do us part. (Sarton, 1974, para. 11)

The three kinds of solitudinous sustainability described above are the solitude that promotes creativity through a paradoxical engagement with others, solitude that promotes engagement with nature, and solitude that promotes engagement with the self. Each of these should — it is proposed — be promoted in schools. Solitude is not being promoted as

a universal panacea, or as a proper state to be permanently sought in schools. Salt is helpful in cooking, adding flavor to food, but eating salt and nothing else would be a poor diet. The same could be said of solitude. What is important, is to have opportunities for and experiences of solitude, within a life where personhood is created through dialogue, in community. Solitude can sustain us — emotionally, creatively, and in our personhood, through dialogue with the self. It can sustain human community, creating strength in greater independence and stronger links with both close and distant people, hence strengthening community. And it can help us sustain the world, through a more direct, perceptive dialogue with and understanding of nature.

How can solitude of the various kinds described here be taught in the school curriculum?

Solitude in the Curriculum

There is a great deal of work to be done, developing a curriculum for solitude suitable to the social, cultural, and economic circumstances of schools. These are initial proposals for a small selection of school subjects, with examples taken primarily from U.K. and other European, North American, and Indian contexts, expanding on the three types of solitude and of sustainability: dialogic-communal, natural, and personhood.

English and Dialogic-Communal Sustainability

While literature itself may be described as "dialogic" (as in Bakhtin, 1981), it is often written and read in intense solitude. Some writers represent that paradox particularly well. The poet Dickinson, for example, wrote of "another Loneliness" (Dickinson, 1970, p. 502), which is a formulation that might be regarded as closer to a positive version of solitude than the traditional forms of loneliness. Lewis (2009) wrote of her poem as one promoting "lonesomeness," in his extended "plea for recognition of the fecund 'lonesomeness' of the greater American

experience" (p. xiii). Lewis went on to describe the "lonesome" in American literature and culture, from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and "then for about an hour there wouldn't be nothing to hear nor nothing to see — just solid lonesomeness" (quoted in Lewis, 2009, p. 54), through to Hank Williams's "I'm so lonesome I could cry" (Lewis, 2009, p. 133). Although Lewis may at times exaggerate the distinction between "lonely" and "lonesome," the latter term is certainly used by some authors to describe a poignant but broadly positive attitude to the world, similar to the common uses of "solitary." It is worth exploring the literature of lonesomeness and solitude in American popular song, including country music, gospel ("You got to walk that lonesome valley/You got to go there by yourself," quoted in Lewis, 2009, p. 140), and the blues. The English poet Larkin wrote of solitude as well as loneliness. Larkin clearly had an ambiguous attitude to solitude, referring to it elsewhere as both comforting and a "vice" — as "Our virtues are all social." His finest poem on solitude, *Best Society* (Larkin, 1988, pp. 56–57), described the emergence of the self, in solitude.

Solitude is described well in Defoe's (2001) *Robinson Crusoe*, in earlier times commonly read by pre-teens, but now more likely read by older children. Younger children may well enjoy the modern equivalent, in Morpurgo's (1999) *Kensuke's Kingdom*. An account of solitude for the very young is *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). A book suitable for good readers from eight upwards is *Marianne Dreams*, by C. Storr (1958; with the book also made into a television series, *Escape Into Night*, and a film, *Paperhouse*). That book describes a girl, isolated by illness, turning to her dreams. Interestingly, the then husband of the author, the psychiatrist Anthony Storr, later wrote a comprehensive psychological account of solitude (A. Storr, 1988).

Sillitoe's (1958) novel, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, appropriate for secondary-age readers, provides a wonderful example of the solitude — and not always loneliness — of running. It also overlaps English and physical education in schools. The running

"hero" of the novel realizes "that as far as I was concerned this feeling was the only honesty and realness there was in the world and I knowing it would be no different ever, no matter what I felt at odd times, and no matter what anybody else tried to tell me" (Sillitoe, 1958, p. 39). In an echo of Thoreau's night-time thought of himself as if he "were the first or last man" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 141), the long-distance runner has a similar sense of his solitude. Hence, in running,

> you've known how it is to be taken bad like the last man on earth on a summer's afternoon, then you get at last to being like the only man on earth and don't give a bogger about either good or bad, but just trot on with your slippers slapping the good dry soil that at least would never do you a bad turn. (Sillitoe, 1958, p. 42)

The study of literature requires a great deal of reading, and reading itself is an exemplary way of practicing solitude. Although some literacy training has emphasized intensely social reading activities (described and criticized by Senechal, 2012, pp. 72–74), the value of "private" or silent reading is still recognized by most teachers. Lantieri (2001) wrote of creating schools that are "divided no more" (quoting Parker Palmer in the same volume), asking the question "Is there reflective silent time in the school day?" (p. 169), and Kessler (2000) added that "giving our students time and permission to daydream in their silence can satisfy this need for rest and respite from constant pressure and for flexing and strengthening an imagination weakened by modern life" (p. 41).

A superb description of a solitude achieved through reading alone is given by Benjamin (1997), who described a child reading who "mingles with the characters far more closely than grown-ups do" and is consequently "unspeakably touched by the deeds, the words that are exchanged, and, when he gets up, is blanched over and over by the snow of his reading" (p. 72). Can we deny children this solitude, this dialogue with people and characters, places and ideas, long gone and ever-present? It can sustain and enrich communities precisely — if paradoxically — by transcending them.

Science, Mathematics, and Natural Sustainability

In science and mathematics, along with related subjects such as computing, there is a long tradition that is still just about alive in schools, that of focused individual work in solitude, in a way that connects pupils directly to nature. This echoes the kind of close observation Thoreau (2006) describes so well, and it is described in the biographies of many of the world's scientists, mathematicians, and computer experts. It is not that being good at these subjects requires a lifetime of solitude (even if some of the key historical figures, such as Newton or Pascal, did just that, according to A. Storr, 1988, p. ix); it is that a focus — on numbers, on things, on ideas, on patterns, on codes — is required. And at such times, the rest of the world may fall away.

Some describe this state as "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), but Csikszentmihalyi, a little surprisingly, has a very sociable view of humanity that more solitudinous readers may well reject. He said that "[e]veryone feels more alive when surrounded with other people" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 165), and that "[m]ost people feel a nearly intolerable sense of emptiness when they are alone" (p. 168). Close observation and concentration in scientific and mathematical work can, instead, develop a close personal relationship with the natural world, the world of "things" and patterns, beyond yet brought into contact with people through their studies. Mathematics tasks for secondary pupils, promoting "lone" work, include using exactly three 3s and mathematical symbols to generate every number from zero to ten, or asking pupils to think of 25 questions with answers of 100. In science, young pupils engage enthusiastically with close observation work (with drawing materials or digital cameras), looking around their school, recording plants and minibeasts. Close dialogue with nature is seen in the well-focused stare of the young child, completing such work. Inevitably, younger and older children will have different experiences and understandings of solitude (Galanaki, 2005, p. 129), but common practices such as close observation in science and other subjects can be helpful at every age.

In such ways, children may develop their understanding of the natural world and, more than this, develop a close relationship to it. A conventional educational approach to sustainability, such as that of Speth (2008), will often be developed through scientific activities.

History, Religious Education, Geography, and Citizenship: Humanity and Personhood

The set of subjects often referred to as the humanities may not only have people as the subjects of study, but may also help children develop their own personhood through understanding and practicing solitude. The two most common historical accounts of solitude in school history lessons are the contrasting traditions of monastic and other mystical forms of solitude, and the solitude of individual explorers and adventurers. Both can excite the curiosity of children, perhaps because both speak to a child's wishes for silent withdrawal and for unimpeded solo adventures. Notwithstanding gender-specific accounts of solitude (described for example by Koch, 1994, pp. 249–273), and the increasing emphasis in history teaching of broad social developments in contrast to a study of "heroes and heroines," the study of mystical and adventurous solitudes (of both sexes) remain and can appeal to the whole range of pupils. Alexander Selkirk (1676–1721) joins history to literature as the marooned sailor in real life who provided a model for Defoe's (2001) *Robinson Crusoe*. The real life of Selkirk is at least as exciting as the novel. And the life of the Buddha joins history to the study of religions, in his initial withdrawal from society into solitude and his gradual reemergence into community. The Hindu-Buddhist religious virtue of solitude is *enstasy* (with a Greek etymology, but a translation from the Sanskrit *samāda*). Whereas ecstasy is a term used in Christian religious literature that refers to going beyond oneself, or escaping oneself, enstasy, in contrast, refers in Hindu-Buddhist literature to being "contented in the self alone" (Zaehner, 1992, p. 326). A key passage in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (book II verses 54 to 58) involves Arjuna asking the Lord Krishna about enstasy while at the point at which he was about to

enter into a battle — combining the mystical and adventuresome themes. Arjuna asks "what is the mark of the man of steady wisdom/The man immersed in enstasy?" Krishna replies:

> When a man puts from him all desires
> That prey upon the mind,
> Himself contented in the self alone,
> Then is he called a man of steady wisdom. (Zaehner, 1992, p. 326)

Such a person, "when he draws in on every side … /As a tortoise might its limbs,/Firm-established is the wisdom of such a man" (Zaehner, 1992, p. 326). This quality of enstasy is the one most often represented in statues of the Buddha, as in the statue at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. The Buddha has his hands overlapping and his eyes half-shut, while sitting cross-legged. It is described specifically as a *Samāda [i.e. enstatic] Buddha*. Can pupils in school describe times when they might be allowed to be more enstatic, more "steadied"? Mapping good places for solitude of this and other kinds, children can share their geographical knowledge and skills in a helpful piece of religious education. And the adventurous side of solitude might be explored — often is explored — in more adventurous off-site visits, whether as part of the geography curriculum or through awards (in the U.K. including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and internationally through the International Award Programme) and scouting, guiding, woodcraft folk and other such youth organizations.

It may seem strange to write of such intensely social and communally oriented organizations as the scouts, as means to develop solitude and through that personhood. Yet as was described in the introduction, pupils may feel themselves more included in school, when left alone. Arendt (2004) describes politics as necessarily social, but she would be the first to recognize the need for sufficient independence (of thought, of action) to allow the development of political systems. This could be called the "politics of one." Totalitarian regimes begin by isolating people, with political isolation the equivalent of personal loneliness (Arendt, 2004, p. 611). But if political isolation is the

equivalent of loneliness, then political independence is surely the equivalent of personal *solitude*. It can strengthen personhood and make for a plural community, rather than one characterized by the uniformity (literal and figurative) of tyranny. In such a way, a sense of nested independence can be created, with individuals, small groups and communities, professional organizations and local government, all the way up to national and international government, each having a significant degree of independence. It starts with the promotion of personhood through solitude.

School Organization

As with the curriculum, there is a great deal of work to be done on how schools organize themselves, to allow for and encourage healthy solitude and thereby promote sustainability.

The Physical Environment

The physical environment of the school is an important way of enhancing opportunities for solitude and sociability. Within classrooms, there has been a move over the last half century from individual desks facing the teacher to clusters of pupils sitting around tables, although all arrangements can still be found in some schools. The older format of classrooms was good for a more didactic relationship between the teacher and pupils, but was worse for pupil-to-pupil interaction. It was the influence of social constructivism that led to more opportunities for pupils to work together. However, the group work promoted by this approach to learning was not always so good for promoting solitudinous study such as silent reading — with pupils interrupted by other pupils, or encouraged to discuss what they are reading almost at the same time as reading the text (Senechal, 2012, pp. 72–74). Corridors and playgrounds can be better or worse for solitude, with better places being quiet corners, seating areas, and rooms available for reading or sitting and thinking while others are playing socially. A good example of

working to create a place for solitude is that of Western Primary School in Harrogate, U.K. (see http://www.western.n-yorks.sch.uk/), which has a quiet room, developed and led by Rachel Mansfield to be "home-like," with comfortable chairs and curtains and flowers and rugs. Children can ask to come to the room at any time. It is not a room for specialist one-to-one tuition (for example for pupils with special educational needs), or a cooling-off place for children in trouble, even though pupils in those situations may choose to visit it. Instead, it is assuredly a quiet room, where pupils can read or draw, or sit and stare, and the adult in charge (i.e., Rachel) will allow for but not insist on quiet conversation. The room is an attempt to create the sort of place a child would feel comfortable in, on their own in their family home.

Pupils themselves can helpfully map the areas of the school that are good for being sociable, good for being in solitude (as suggested above), and those places that are "good" for being bullied, the scary places. Only when teachers engage with pupils' own views of the school environment will they be in a position to influence and redesign the environment. Teachers should not be afraid of "lonely places." There is a long history — already hinted at in Philips's poem, and abundant in Romantic prose and poetry — of ascribing loneliness to places rather than people. Nouwen (1974) wrote that a "life without a lonely place, that is, a life without a quiet center, easily becomes destructive" (p. 21). Sometimes these lonely places are indeed places where people will be lonely; at other times, lonely places are places for being alone and in solitude. Many will recognize the idea of being in a wild and "lonely" place, walking in the hills perhaps, and enjoying the solitude, when all of a sudden your mood changes (or an idea crosses your mind, or the weather changes, or something happens), and you are suddenly feeling lonely. The same can be true of places within schools. A child sitting reading or staring into space, in an otherwise empty classroom, or sitting idly in the corner of a playground, can make a teacher fearful. But if the child is enjoying solitude, or even if they are feeling lonely, the interruption of a teacher making them join in some sociable activity elsewhere in the school is not likely to be so welcome. And for the

child and the teacher alike, a spot of solitude can help put things in perspective. As Nouwen said, "[w]hen you are able to create a lonely place in the middle of your actions and concerns, your successes and failures slowly can lose some of their power over you" (p. 26).

Schools should be environments that encourage all three kinds of solitudinous dialogue: dialogue with distant people and places (places to read, to daydream, to be "somewhere else" in the midst of school), dialogue with nature (fascinating plants and creatures, ponds, trees), and dialogue with yourself (daydreaming spots, thoughtful places).

Play

Over the years, play, like silence, has had better or worse times, a higher or lower status, in schools. Much of the play of young people is sociable, but, here, the ability of children to play on their own is what is important (Senechal, 2012, pp. 172–173). The highpoint of Romanticism gave us a modern sense of loneliness and the value of solitude. It also produced the philosophy which put the "play-drive" at the heart of humanity and learning, in Schiller's (1795/1967) account of how the emotions and intellect are brought together and practiced in play. Schools should be encouraging a whole range of play from the more social to the more solitudinous, and the play that is encouraged should be positive and not a desperate attempt to fill time. As Thoreau (2006) said, "[t]he mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation":

> What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.… A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. (p. 7)

However, he continued, "it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things" (Thoreau, 2006, p. 7). A beautiful description of solitary play as a form of "quiet desperation" is given by Yates (2009) in one of his short stories *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*. A new boy, Vincent Sabella, joins a class, and is left out of the play of all the other children:

> He stayed on the apron of the playground, close to school, and for the first part of the recess he pretended to be very busy with the laces of his sneakers. He would squat to undo and retie them, straighten up and take a few experimental steps in a springy, athletic way, and then get down and go to work on them again. After five minutes of this he gave it up, picked up a handful of pebbles and began shying them at an invisible target several yards away. That was good for another five minutes, but then there were still five minutes left, and he could think of nothing to do but stand there, first with his hands in his pockets, then with his hands on his hips, and then with his arms folded in a manly way across his chest. (Yates, 2009, pp. 483–484.)

The solitary play that schools can encourage includes reading, looking at pictures and displays, looking after the school garden or the school hamster, or rehearsing a presentation or sporting skill (see, e.g., Galanaki, 2005, p. 130). With reflection, teachers can always think of such activities, although they often prefer to leave children to play in peace, not always noticing that desperate play is one of the loneliest of activities, and sociable "structured play" may not fulfil all the children's needs for play. Solitary play allows pupils to focus on dialogue with themselves. It may even allow them to daydream:

> Occasionally giving our students time and permission to daydream in their silence can satisfy [their] need for rest and respite from constant pressure and for flexing and strengthening an imagination weakened by modern life. "So often when a child looks out the window, we say she's off task," says Nel Noddings … "Well, she may be on the biggest task of her life." (Kessler, 2000, p. 41)

Conclusion: Sustainable Solitude

This article is written for those working with schools, wishing to develop sustainability and wishing to develop solitude. Good healthy solitude can help everyone, those who are at every point of the sociable-loner scale, and at every point of the lonely-unlonely scale. Solitude is the salt of personhood, and teaching solitude can help sustain individual people,

groups of people in communities and societies, and the relationship of people to the wider natural world. The relationship between sustainability and solitude is complex yet rarely explored. Attempting to bring them together can help schools become more human, and can help the world as a whole. And if communities and societies and the rest of the world fall apart, solitude can outlast them all, as the last person reflects on how we came to this point.

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