

“Let the main object...[be] to seek and to find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners learn more”.

John Amos Comenius; Father of modern education.

Before I introduce you to the teacher that I am nominating, I want to introduce you very quickly to the school where she works. Tamarack West Outdoor School is an outdoor school that was created ten years ago, located on the west side of Toronto. At least half of each day (and much more in the Fall and Spring) is spent outdoors in the largest wooded park in the city. Tamarack’s mandate is to provide an outdoor/experiential education that creates a compassionate, challenging and inspiring environment where students feel safe to take risks and explore their potential. Dedicated to helping develop resilient, confident and passionate children with inquisitive minds and strong skills.

The teachers at Tamarack work together; there is a lot of collaboration and support, and each class has team teaching. I have tried very hard in this application to speak to activities and aspects that are specific to Miriam. Miriam would be the first, though, to sing the praises of her fellow teachers and recognize all that she learns from them on a day-to-day basis.

Miriam

Imagine a classroom where time moves slower...where the flow of your thoughts is welcomed and encouraged, where the idea of learning is associated with excitement, collaboration and empowerment. Now imagine a teacher in that space who is far more interested in what you are doing than what you are not, a teacher who sees each of your actions as speaking to needs and works with you to identify and fulfill them. A teacher who sees you as a wealth of ideas and opinions and works tirelessly to help you know your own greatness and learn how best to share it with others.

This “classroom” exists! Not so much as a location but in the immediate area around one of the greatest teachers I’ve ever known. Her name is Miriam. She has been teaching for over twenty-five years, and I have had the greatest fortune of working with her for the last ten of them

Miriam once said to me that she finds it hard to say what she does when so much of what she does is nothing. I love the humility, but have to remind her of the hours she spends outside of school: researching, learning, planning. The hours she spends in school: guiding, instructing, supporting. She smiles, but is not convinced.

Miriam's "doing less" creates a space where time slows...allowing the thoughts, ideas and inspirations of those in her sphere to percolate, be flipped, twisted and spread out, then tossed around again...all while expanding outward into an expression of awe and wonder.

Miriam is a timekeeper, and in this unique space where time is stilled, she gives each of her students the freedom to think, to explore, to ask questions and to seek out answers, absolving them of the judgment that comes with expectations and giving them the trust that builds their confidence to learn.

Not being satisfied with simply adjusting time, Miriam also hands each student the power to shift their perspective; to move from the forest floor to the tops of the canopies, a shift that sparks conversation, curiosity and reflection. Ideas emerge, a bit of information is added; a word of support, encouragement and love. The ideas expand and take root, growing stronger through shared trust and wonder.

Spending time in Miriam's class feels like standing in a forest: alive with quiet growth and connection. The roots reach wide and deep while the canopy grows fuller each day.

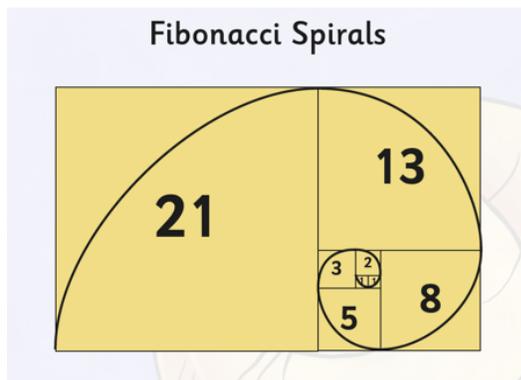
This is not the story of specific outcomes; it is the story of a forest...and of one tree within it who attends, nurtures, and supports.

Nature and Creative Literacy

Digital technology is not a priority for the younger kids at Tamarack. This is in part because they spend more than half of each day in the woods (not an ideal location for digital technology) and also because Miriam intentionally tries to move her students (ages 4-9) away from the predominance of screens in their lives. Because of this, I've decided to swap out "digital" for "nature".

Miriam made the shift to nature years ago: “I was drawn to teach outdoors because I witnessed how much more curious and confident children become when outside in Nature; concepts in general are acquired much more readily”.

There are so many examples of Miriam’s use of nature, but a favourite lesson of mine is when Miriam introduced her students to the Fibonacci sequence. Miriam had her students collect evergreen cones and asked them to make observations; among these were the spiral shapes the scales make around the cones. She then asked them to count the spirals and record their numbers. They then observed asters and sunflowers and did the same thing with the spiral shapes of the flowers and seeds, respectively. The students were asked if they saw any patterns. They observed that the spirals were consistently the same group of numbers (most often 21, 8, 13). Miriam asked them if they had any idea why, which led to a discussion.



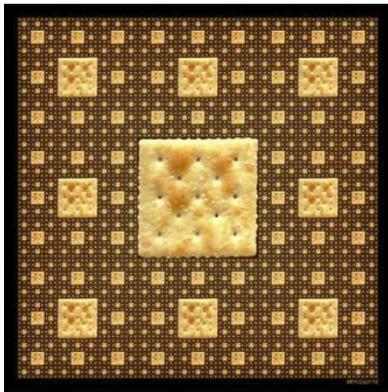
(visuals to show the Fibonacci sequence in nature)

Miriam then introduced them to the Fibonacci sequence, which she referred to as a “magical series” of numbers. She explained how the numbers in the sequence were derived (each next number is the sum of the previous two, starting with 0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21, etc) and let the kids play with this idea. Some students challenged themselves trying to go as far as they could, calculating the next number in the sequence, while others repeated the first five numbers over and over like a song. Miriam then asked if they had noticed anything similar about these numbers and the ones they had recorded; they noted that the numbers in the sequence were the same as the numbers they had recorded from the spirals in the flowers and cones. She asked them what they thought

this might mean, and again a discussion erupted. Miriam loved this and explained how this spiral shape and the number of spirals actually have a benefit to plants, maximizing sun exposure as well as seed density.

She asked the students if they had observed other such patterns in nature. They talked about snail shells, other plants, branch patterns and certain vegetables like Romanesco broccoli and cauliflower.

During free time, the kids invented a game called spiral tag, based on what they had just learned.



(visual Miriam employed to illustrate the Sierpinski Carpet)

Miriam ended the lesson with an introduction to fractals and the Sierpinski Carpet, which they then learned to draw on graph paper. The rest of the afternoon, the kids were drawing spirals and identifying similar patterns. The lesson's impact could be felt weeks, months, even years later, when the students were still actively pointing out whenever they saw evidence of the Fibonacci sequence. The point of the lesson? Pattern recognition, number sequencing, arithmetic and connecting math to nature and life. All are benchmarks in Ontario's curriculum guidelines, and all are seamlessly and holistically taught to engaged students.

One of the benefits of spending so much time in the woods each day is that the kids develop a deep connection with their surroundings. A favourite place is "Fairy Village". This is a small opening in the woods that the students and other community members

have been decorating over the years with natural ornaments. Hollows in trees look like fairy homes, and a few little fairy houses have been added.

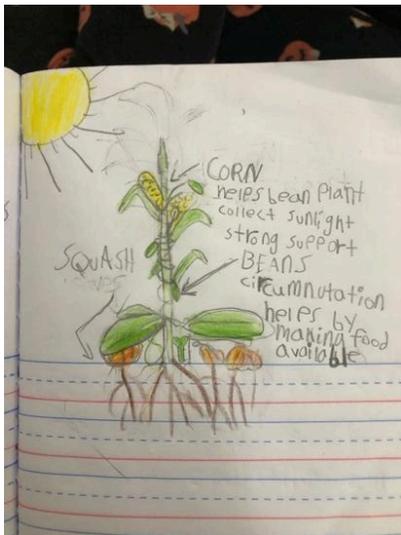
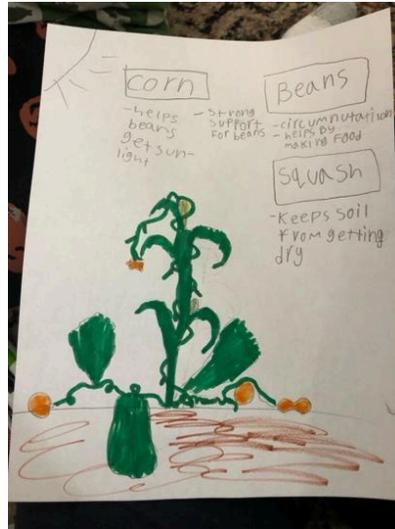
The class often travels here for lessons, especially for literacy. There is an energy among the group when visiting this area; imaginations are sparked. Miriam has worked over the years to make this space an inspiration for writing. Regularly, Miriam will encourage the students to write notes to the fairies, which they leave in a certain spot. A response is assured within a few days, creating back-and-forth communication that has helped a number of students move past some of their anxieties around writing. Miriam also often reads from Cicely Mary Barker's "Flower Fairy" stories. After which, students are asked to choose flowers about which to write their own stories. These have included how some have developed medicinal properties (stinging nettle), how some got their name (jewelweed), how so many have come to grow in a particular spot, etc. Applying their knowledge and imagination to create truly unique stories, the students love the activity and eagerly share their stories with their teachers and each other.

Miriam has long been interested in Companion planting (not least the metaphor it carries for society in general) and decided to introduce the concept to her students through The Three Sisters. The Three Sisters are the three main agricultural crops for a number of indigenous people of North America; they include maize, squash and climbing beans.

Miriam brought many examples for the students to see, touch and discuss.



The group then read a few versions of the indigenous story of the Three Sisters, which introduced the discussion about the collaboration of the plants; tall stalks of the corn support the beans to climb, beans fix nitrogen in the soil for shared use, and squash has broad leaves to help the soil stay moist.



The students then divided into groups of four, and each group acted out the collaboration of the three Sisters while one group member narrated. The plays were lots of fun; how does corn sound when it thanks a squash for the shade? Is it awkward when a bean first starts climbing up the stalk of corn?

Later, the group visited gardens with companion planting in action and learned more about the origins of the tradition.



Finally, at the end of the week, the students wrote out the recipe for a three sisters stew and made the stew together at the school, which they shared with everyone.

Innovative and Exemplary Teaching Practices

“I approach teaching children as a gardener approaches tending a garden. Young children need to be supported in a way that helps them grow strong roots and a means to feel connected to their natural rhythms. When grounded and feeling connected, they are not stressed but resilient and open to exploring new things. Each year, the themes are meant to create another layer of learning. Instead of distinct units that are finished, studied, tested and moved on from, we have teachings that are returned to and deepened daily, weekly, monthly and yearly”.

Miriam

What makes Miriam such a phenomenal teacher? First and foremost, at the top of the list, the thing above all else that I hope every teacher practices, embodies and believes – she has an absolute commitment to being non-judgemental. And she is this way with everyone, students, parents, and peers alike. This commitment is what allows Miriam to approach each child exclusively from the point of view of “needs being met” and work with them where they are at, not where others think they should be. This approach allows each child to thrive at their own pace and feel the success of their growth from one day to the next. It is also a model from which students and other teachers alike are influenced, leading to greater openness and a strong

classroom community. More than anything else, this one trait plays a large part in creating the warm, supportive and compassionate atmosphere that enriches each year's classroom.

A further result of this commitment is the absolute trust that Miriam builds with each of her students individually and as a group. This trust is built, of course, through Miriam's warmth and non-judgmental, supportive nature. Equally important, it grows from the trust Miriam gives back. This is a unique gift – Miriam trusts her students, trusts that they want to engage and to learn and that they will achieve great things if given the opportunity. I've heard some refer to this idea as setting high expectations, but that, to me, would imply judgment. Trust is definitely the word when applied to Miriam. And it is through this trust that Miriam can genuinely follow her students' interests with such diligence, compassion and respect.

Watching Miriam teach, you begin to understand that her classroom is more than a place of learning; it's a community built on trust, respect, and care. Her students learn not only content, but confidence; not only skills, but empathy. In a world that often measures success by outcomes, Miriam reminds us that growth begins with understanding, and understanding begins with trust. Miriam works late most evenings, planning activities and lessons for the next day. Join her group for the morning circle, and you'll hear all about these thoughtful plans, carefully crafted to guide the day ahead. But stay a little longer, and you may be surprised by how quickly everything can shift. A frog hopping across the path, a trail of insects on the move or the whim of a moment can completely redirect the day.

This is Miriam in action: a masterful musician waiting for that moment when inspiration creates an opening and improvisation takes the song to a place far beyond the notes on the page. Inspiration that arises organically is something Miriam cherishes, knowing exactly how to nurture these moments, guiding spontaneous discoveries into meaningful learning.

These qualities become unmistakable when you look at the kinds of opportunities Miriam builds into her teaching and the responsibilities she invites her students to take on. For example, "Tamarack takeover" is a fairly regular event where the older students take over the school for

the day, planning and running all the activities and lessons for the younger kids. An event Miriam initiated years ago.

Miriam includes lots of different ideas in her teaching, from inquiry-based learning to peer-to-peer teaching; she is always following the energy and personality of the group as a whole and the students individually. An example of this is when the students were discussing their inspirational person of the week. One student chose to speak about an individual in Canadian politics who had made a significant contribution to society in a positive way, but was also responsible for some negative actions. This inspired a discussion about what prompts change in society and a reflection on our personal roles.

To engage the students in a fun Project-based learning activity to get them thinking of how they would like to make a contribution to the world, Miriam created the Invention Convention. Each student was given a small bag with a random assortment of Lego. The assignment was open-ended. They were simply asked to make something “useful.” They then wrote about their invention and made a presentation to the class. The inventions were photographed and paired with the written work on a bulletin board display.



Throughout the project, collaboration was encouraged, and students were able to bounce ideas and debate innovative solutions amongst themselves. They became more and more inquisitive as they recognized the complexity of the issues they were tackling.

The students really enjoyed the activity, and their inventions ranged from a chicken-baking machine that produced battered chicken at the press of a button to a system of managing garbage waste efficiently. One student, a very reluctant writer who struggled with putting down words, was inspired to write a full two-page description of his invention. The convention concluded with the students all being awarded an Invention Convention medal and a celebration.

At its core, this is simply how Miriam teaches: not from a place of authority, but through shared guidance and discovery. She offers insights, asks open-ended questions, and lets the group's curiosity shape the direction of learning. Whether she has the answer or is exploring alongside them, Miriam creates a space where everyone can learn together through inquiry, discussion, and genuine exploration.

Student Success and Skills Development

“No matter the topic, I work to be sure students feel the learning is worthwhile. Students become more engaged and will voluntarily extend their learning because their curiosity is piqued and they see value in the work they put in”.

Miriam

One thing I've noticed about Miriam's teaching over the years is that she rarely repeats the same approach. She doesn't teach from a manual or follow a predetermined method. Each year feels entirely new because each group of students creates a different classroom. Miriam draws from countless approaches and responds to the unique dynamic of the class in front of her.

Experiential, personalized learning forms the foundation of her lessons: learning in real time, with real life.

Meeting students' needs is central to Miriam's practice, which is why differentiated learning is woven through everything she does.

An example of this is the way Miriam recently taught a unit on time. It began with her drawing a time scale of the day and asking the students to map out the lessons, lunch, snack and recreation time. It was up to them to choose how they divided up their recreation time and the placement of snack time. She then brought out a clock, and they implemented the time management plan. The students responded with enthusiasm: one student created her own version of the timescale, another noticed that time was like fractions on a pie. This opened the door to discuss pie graphs and how they show information at a glance. Another student asked if they could extend the time of one of the activities, but then realized this would impact the time of another. Eureka. Time cannot simply be created. The group then annotated the timescale. Cooperative learning in action.

Throughout the day, discussions about time were ongoing, in particular, on how to best ensure all of the items on the time scale could be achieved. Through this single lesson, the students took a meaningful step toward understanding reciprocity, increasing their awareness of how their choices shape the flow of the day. It also fueled a community response where the students were actively supporting each other, packing up their lunches and getting ready to go outside. Time can be tempered with cooperation.

One thing I love about Miriam's teaching style is the priority she puts on her students' emotional well-being. Anxiety can quickly undermine a healthy learning environment. I remember a few years ago, a group of her older students had started expressing dislike for school as a way of avoiding the more challenging lessons. Miriam realized this was coming from a fear of failure that had somehow gripped the group.

She decided to start the week with a video of Denzel Washington giving a speech to graduates. The theme was failure, not only how it is inevitable, but how it must be expected and welcomed, that it is only through exposing ourselves to the possibility of failure that we ever learn and have the chance to grow and succeed. She connected the speech to the students' daily lessons and encouraged collaborative learning by having the students conduct peer reviews on completed

assignments. The format was “Three Stars and a Suggestion,” feedback on three successes of the assignment and a suggestion for further development.

The combination of Washington’s words and the peer-to-peer collaboration quickly improved the morale of the class, and students began taking on greater challenges.

Risk-taking fosters growth. It helps children build confidence, develop new skills and learn to understand how failure can be a valuable learning experience. At Tamarack, we allow for some risky play with clear guidelines. Stick play, snowball battles, climbing and structure building are a few examples. Noticing students were having trouble understanding the point at which FUN play turned to unsafe, upsetting NOT FUN play, Miriam designed an activity to support the students titled “Fire as Teacher.”

To help the students understand this shift more clearly, Miriam designed a lesson she called “Fire as Teacher.” She brought in her props: one plain white marshmallow, one nicely browned marshmallow and one fully charred marshmallow. All three were sitting on a plate. Miriam asked the group, “What is the story here?” The students could clearly see what the marshmallows represented: various stages of exposure to fire. A discussion on the diversity of likes ensued, where students and teachers shared preferences ranging from eating raw marshmallows to enjoying fully burnt marshmallows put into the fire multiple times. They discussed different preferences and tolerances, which led right into a discussion of risk tolerance and safety. Fire is a wonderful teacher with its clear boundaries of safety. There is a point where one can get too close to the fire. This might be fine if you prefer your marshmallows burnt, but in a real campfire situation, it can be dangerous. The students shared lots of examples of personal experiences where they themselves, their friends, or their siblings had been hurt or almost hurt by fire.

They were then encouraged to relate experiences with other examples of a FUN experience turning NOT FUN, and discussing where the turning point was. There was a follow-up literacy activity on a piece of paper with a crease down the middle. One side was titled FUN, and the other titled NOT FUN, with the crease representing the turning point. The accompanying sentence was: “_____ was FUN until _____ happened to make it NOT FUN.” Students eagerly shared stories about sibling play, fire safety stories, betrayals of trust and more.

Since that lesson, the teachers have used this analogy “crease in the paper” time and time again to help students debrief on game mishaps, friend upsets, etc. Helping them move away from the tendency to blame someone or something, to looking at the evolution of the play or activity and pinpointing at what point something changed to bring about the unwanted outcome. Students now independently debrief using this problem-solving perspective.

Global Citizenship

“I am a passenger on the spaceship Earth.”

R. Buckminster Fuller

There is a ten foot by four and a half foot map that is pasted to a wall in the school at Tamarack. It is known as a Dymaxion map and was designed by Buckminster Fuller. This map attempts to accurately lay out the spherical world onto a two-dimensional plane without distortion or misrepresentation of proportions. The projection is compelling. Spread out as it is, one sees how the world is actually one long connected piece of land separated only at parts by tiny spans of water. Fuller’s objective was clear; in seeing one large land mass without borders, he hoped to inspire a global outlook where the individual considers their community as including family, friends and neighbours, a group that includes everyone who lives on this earth.

I was going to leave the map behind when we moved school locations five years ago. Miriam insisted we keep it.

I believe connection is one of Miriam’s prime motivators; connecting to students, peers, parents and the world at large. A practice at Tamarack is to encourage parents to check in with teachers at drop-off and pick-up. These chats often last more than just a few minutes, but Miriam is dedicated to them, arguing that they are essential in allowing for the organic flow of information and feedback and the confirmation to everyone involved that it is a team effort, including students, teachers and parents, in the support of each child’s growth and learning.

Expanding on this connection, Miriam has been able to bring family members into the school to share, support and teach.

A visit I remember fondly is when one of the students' grandmothers came in to talk about her experience growing up as an Indian in the apartheid state of South Africa. She started by telling the kids where she was originally from and the type of system they had there at the time. She then shared stories, some tragic, others funny. It was a very human recount of a terrible regime. Miriam facilitated the visit expertly, helping the students navigate the topic in a way that supported their curiosity while buffering them from some of the more extreme horrors that could have been discussed. The visit had two significant impacts: a broader worldview and the beginning of a cross-generational friendship that grew over the months and years.

Stepping further out from the family to the city and country, Miriam eagerly supported a suggestion that came to her from a parent regarding a local author. Will O'Hara is the author of a book called *Enemy Arrows*, the story of three young Wendat warriors living in the year 1420 in what is now the Baby Point area in Toronto's west end.

Miriam helped organize the teachers to make sure the students had copies of the book and were either reading it themselves or were having it read to them at school. Once the book had been read, Will was invited to come to the school and meet the students. He read a bit from the book and answered questions. He then took the whole school on a field trip to the area where the story takes place, recreating what it would have looked like, identifying old trails and linking the past to the present. The students were thrilled and talked fondly of the event months after the fact. Family, history, stories and ideas. Where do they all come from? A global citizen may have one big question: how did we ever learn to communicate?

Miriam has a love of words and a passion for etymology. She once told me:

“One year, I taught about the evolution of language. We studied Quipu, the ancient recording devices made with knotted strings, historically used by a number of cultures in the Central Andes Mountains. Students made their own language using tokens imprinted into clay. We then explored the possible transitions from practical concrete expression to abstract thought. From there, we explored how pictures were used to share information, ideas and stories. I then invented a language we called Tamarackian to provide a fun way to explore picture symbols in language. The students practised decoding messages written in Tamarackian. I followed this with

an etymology exploration, where we looked back in time from modern language and explored the roots of words, Latin, Greek, German, Norse, loan words and more. The students were most interested in the Viking aspect, so we went to an exhibition at the ROM and investigated the Norse runes of the Vikings. Later, we travelled the neighbourhood, noticing how many street names had connections to Indigenous language and peoples. This became something we did regularly when walking in a new neighbourhood.”

If connection to people is the cornerstone of community, active participation in its stewardship is the building block. At least four times per year, Miriam gets the students to take part in a garbage cleanup in the massive wooded park we visit. The students work in teams collecting garbage and recycling, they then weigh it. After that, they make posters encouraging others to keep the park clean.

In the same park, the students learn about the traditional controlled burn that takes place each year. This year, they met with the Fire Keeper and learned the traditional way of beginning the sacred fire. In past years, they have attended the community information session before the burn, to learn how the city comes together with the community to prepare by researching the site, monitoring growth and weather patterns and preparing on the day by running through the burn areas to scare animals away so they do not get hurt.

Back to the Dymaxion map I wanted to leave behind. In the end, I was not surprised by Miriam’s insistence that we keep it. I remembered all the activities she had done around the map, linking students’ travels, families and histories, connecting these locations with strings and pins, markers and symbols. The map had been an indoor resource that mirrored much of what Miriam strives for in the outdoors, a symbol of the school’s philosophy toward community and the world in general.

Commitment and Leadership

A few months ago, I was home on a Saturday night when I got a text from Miriam. She was updating me on a solution she wanted to try regarding some struggles a student was having in the class. It was classic Miriam; home on a Saturday night, thinking about a student. What struck me at that moment was not so much her solution (though fascinating as it was) but rather the time of day and the day itself. Miriam had spent another part of her Saturday researching (because when Miriam encounters challenges in a class, she loves to research), contemplating and communicating the needs of a student. I feel like this is something that I have been taking for granted - Miriam has been contacting me at random times of the day and night for as long as we've worked together. For some reason, on this particular Saturday, it struck me. It wasn't long after that I began filling out this nomination.

When one takes the approach of meeting students' needs, one has committed oneself to a process that takes them well beyond the hours and expectations of their job. I can only see this as a sacrifice, but I don't believe Miriam would agree. In fact, I believe she sees it as a privilege, a way of life that supports her greatest passion...learning.

Often when a student is struggling, whether it be academically, socially or emotionally, Miriam will initiate her "meeting needs" protocol; an arduous task of identifying these needs and how to best support them. The process of identification alone can take weeks, often starting with conversations with the child's parents as well as meetings with the other teachers. Miriam will then do her own research, looking through journals and articles, searching for clues. Once she thinks she's accurately identified these need(s), Miriam then researches the best ways to integrate the necessary support on a daily basis. She will then monitor and adjust accordingly. This is a massive undertaking that requires incredible dedication as well as skill, none of which would be there if she did not have an innate passion for this very thing. What baffles me is that Miriam has been doing this consistently for every student since the school opened, and it does not seem to wear her down; in fact, I think it feeds her energy and seems to fill her with joy.

This process is not limited to identifying and supporting needs; for Miriam, it is not enough to follow her students' interests. She needs to learn as much as she can so that she can integrate

these interests into her curriculum in the most meaningful and efficient way. I remember when my son and his friends were reading the Percy Jackson series, Miriam bought a copy of the first novel and read it as she brushed up on her Greek mythology, all so she could support this interest of a few of her students. This commitment to learning her students' interests goes much deeper. Since starting the school Miriam has attended courses in Survival Skills, Tracking Skills, Medicinal Plants, Basket Making, Wild Culturing (2 year course), Indigenous History as well as attending a number of Council of Outdoor Educators (COEO) Conferences, all of which were initiated by students' interests or in pursuit of information to help better share one of her own.

Teachers often turn to Miriam for advice and support. She doesn't always have the answers but is relied upon for her willingness to troubleshoot, discuss and try out solutions. The same spark that comes from her interaction with the students can be seen when discussing ideas and approaches with her fellow teachers. It's not the extra time Miriam will give to anyone who needs it, nor the wealth of experience she brings to any issue – I think what makes Miriam such a leader in the school is her joy in solving problems and her confidence in the abilities of her fellow teachers. She listens to ideas with genuine excitement and tries to support each teacher's initiatives with as much enthusiasm as if it were her own. This camaraderie, coming from such a seasoned teacher, at the same time gives her peers confidence in their own abilities as well as in the support that will be there, should they need it.

If there were any doubt as to Miriam's leadership in the school, one only needs to look to the ECE placement students who consistently, without fail, turn to Miriam for guidance and support. Going well beyond her job description, Miriam has been known to spend evenings and weekends working with these placement students, helping them with their own coursework and supporting them in their contributions to the school. Over the years, I have reminded her how this is not our responsibility, but she is indifferent to my entreaties - she sees a student in need, and she responds. I have to admit it has served us very well as we have inevitably hired a number of these students over the years, and they have always hit the ground running, in large part due to the mentoring they received from Miriam.

I'll leave you with one final story that I only just heard about from one of the mothers a few weeks ago. It seems that her son (who is in Miriam's class) had broken his arm and was not able to attend school for a week or two. After the first week or so, the mother reached out to Miriam and told her how sad the boy was and how much he missed her. Miriam agreed to meet them in the park on her day off and spent most of the day with them. This is the kind of relationship that comes from incredible commitment and dedication. I'm hoping that if Miriam ever reads this, she will see just how much extra she really does, but I somehow doubt it will have that effect.

Conclusion

When I was starting Tamarack West, Miriam was the first teacher I approached. We instantly connected over a shared philosophy on how to best support children through the elementary years of learning. Miriam's skillset: a rich background in math (teaching both in schools as well as a tutor, supporting students from elementary right through to University), literacy (a passion for etymology and literature) and science (specifically environmental, conservation and biology) was impressive. I humbly asked her if she would be interested in working at the school, and she humbly accepted – a good sign for a working relationship that has been exceptional.

Within the first few months of working together at the school, my confidence in Miriam's teaching grew infinitely, not least because of the constant positive feedback I was getting from parents, students and teachers alike. Five years into the school, Miriam was awarded the Edward Burtynsky award for Teaching Excellence in Environmental Education through Natural Curiosity. This was significant in that it came from the larger community, recognizing Miriam's unique excellence. Over the last five years, the compliments and rave reviews have only increased in scope and quantity.

It took me about six years to finally sit down and make this nomination happen. I don't think much would have been different had I written this six years ago, save the extra years of consistent and exceptional commitment.

I'll finish with one last thought. I called Miriam the other day to ask her a very quick question about an upcoming outdoor activity that I wanted to let parents know about in advance. Two hours later, we hung up. We talked about different students, new initiatives Miriam had recently introduced to the group and a fellow teacher who was having great success reaching a particular group of students. We talked about education in general and certain practices in particular. The conversation only ended when I pointed out that we'd been talking for two hours on a call that was supposed to last five minutes. Miriam laughed. It took another ten or fifteen minutes before we actually hung up.

Being hyper-aware of all that is Miriam through this very long process of nominating her for this award, I smiled – I finally had my conclusion. Miriam is not an exceptional teacher because she tries so hard; she is an exceptional teacher because she is exactly where she wants to be, doing exactly what she was born to do.

There are those people who have managed to make a career out of what they love, while maintaining the integrity of their passions - a rare breed but easily identified by the sparkle in their eyes and the smile that comes quickly to their face, and equally by the effect they have on those around them. Walk into Miriam's class on any given day you will be instantly struck by the joy on the faces of her students. Miriam's classroom is filled with such joy because Miriam herself is absolutely content; a unique individual who found her calling at a young age and delved forward with courage and integrity. Courage to seek out her own path and the integrity to follow it. Miriam is one hundred percent genuine, making it easy for her to live her passion because it is without contradiction and flows easily from classroom to home to social gatherings, etc.

I could go on and on about Miriam, but I won't. It has been a great pleasure writing this nomination. Thank you for taking the time to read it.