Introduction

As university educators, we are aware of the constant negotiation of selves – home-identities, teaching identities, professional identities – among others. While the systemic conditions in which many of us work provide strong pressures to produce a neo-liberal self that becomes appropriated by others, we believe that being reflexive about the construction and re-construction of selves is an important part of our ethical practice. Reflexive inquiry recognizes our capacity to acknowledge the socialization processes we experience daily and to act with agency to resist these processes if need be. In addition, deepened self-knowledge and critical renegotiation contributes to further reconstructions of self (Lyle, 2013). Reflexivity allows us to view the intertwining of selves, to question how institutional demands shape our pedagogies and often run counter to our values, and to scrutinize ourselves suspiciously for the things we have come to take for granted. At the same time, we recognize the impossibility of the self to be visible and observable to itself and the difficulty of seeing the fleeting, partial parts of ourselves. Identity is inevitably complex, multi-voiced, and always under construction.

In this chapter, we would like to explore the de/construction of our imaginative selves. Metta (2011) argues that imagination has a strong relationship to the assembly of self/selves even as it is part of that de/construction. We suggest that imaginative processes of identity construction create the pathways for the possibilities of future selves while, at the same time, they re-constitute our past selves. These imaginative selves are important for our outward identities as teacher educators because they allow us to speak from different positions: imaginatively, creatively, and artistically. These multiple selves are in a state of interdependence that not only blurs the lines between the professional and the personal, but also actively contributes towards an ethical teaching identity (Allen, 2011).

Through narratives, images, and a post-structural research lens (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016), we explore our hidden art hobbies – home as art and
making paper art dolls – and trouble their position on hierarchies of arts and crafts. We suggest that the de/construction of our artistic selves is imperative for our epistemological expansion and, inevitably, for our engagement with teaching. We narrate self-connections, unstable and fluid as they are, within the discourses that privilege some identities/art and not others. These subjective incursions reveal contradiction and contestation but also sites of rebirth and rejuvenation.

Reflexive Inquiry, Teaching Identities, and Creative Hobbies

With poststructuralism, there is an increasing move towards self-conscious reflexive writing. The urge to turn the spotlight on ourselves as objects of research has become increasingly hard to resist. Yet, reflexivity is also filled with tensions and challenges because it is at the same time both clear and contradictory (Faulkner et al., 2016). On one end of the spectrum reflexivity may be positioned as realist where researchers write about themselves and their experiences of being subjects and aim to create an authentic rendition of aspects of their daily lives (Davis et al., 2004). Other end of the spectrum there is no essential self that floats free of discourse. Discursive work is always at play in any act of writing/analyzing, and there are limits to self-consciousness (Lather, 1993). Here, the subject is deconstructed to the point that it is no longer visible. The difficulty is trying to find a middle-ground. We are subjects who read, analyse, and are self-reflexive, and who draw on our own experiences to make sense of the world. We are realists in the sense that we create linear narratives. But we are also aware that, as discursive subjects, we often cannot see beyond our subject-space. There are no secure footholds to both gaze at oneself as the subject as well as to be the object gazed upon. As teachers, we feel it is important to grapple with reflexivity, however elusive and intangible. We recognize and acknowledge that we are always in our texts (and our classrooms) no matter how objectively we try to write or how professionally we perform our teaching. Our struggle is to “avoid realist claims and the reproduction of narrow and oppressive frames that hold social categories in place” while at the same time recognizing that we too are shaped, constructed, and reproduced by language and discourse practices (Davis et al., 2004, p. 368). To do this, we accept that the “self both is and is not a fiction, is unified and transcendent and fragmented and always in process of being constituted, can be spoken of in realist ways and cannot, and that its voice can be claimed as authentic and there is no guarantee of authenticity” (Davis et al., 2004, p. 384). We cannot see ourselves in the multiplicity of fragile, contradictory, and shifting identities but, through continued self-reflexivity, we can begin to know our own positionings – both