Chapter 14

Becoming Community: Ranya’s Story of Intergenerational Teaching and Learning in Art Education

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Getting to Know One Another

As artwork scholarship, this story of becoming-community is written from an arts-based research perspective, one of many dispositions to take up reflexive inquiry. In this case, Ranya, a mature student in her mid-thirties who immigrated to Canada years earlier, returned to university to earn a degree in art education, and that is where we join her in this conversation. Ranya was a student-teacher assigned to the community group commonly known as the Concordia Seniors. The Concordia Seniors met weekly on campus to partake in informal learning opportunities organised by continuing education, which included our dedicated studio class. Along with a second student-teacher and six of the seniors in that class, she was part of a larger study in art education investigating the experiences of third-age learners.

During the course of the year, Ranya's story emerged as a mediation of an intergenerational experience of teaching and learning that offered insight to the interplay of public-private, self-other, student-teacher, and younger-older. Verbatim quotes drawn from interviews conducted with Ranya are woven together into story form to highlight how she mapped her identity as she undertook responsibility for planning, designing, and delivering curriculum for the first time. Through ongoing reflexive inquiry, Ranya cultivated an emergent self, where becoming a teacher in community required continual dialogue about beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and rationale, in relation to conditions and events in the classroom, to inform understandings of professional and personal practice. As an expression of life writing, her story charts the dynamics of exchange residing within such relationships of learning and demonstrates how reflexive inquiry is central in articulating epistemological qualities of the art of teaching and learning as an ongoing negotiation of self-always-in-relation.
Why Reflexive Inquiry?

Reflexive inquiry may be imagined as an eclectic rhizome, inclusive of hegemonic discourses that contextualizes our individual stories and our worldviews, and our resulting modes of inquiry in curriculum and instruction. Reflexivity provides a means of sustaining the teaching self through continuous negotiation of positionality, encouraging “intuitive and/or transient ways of knowing” (Rolling, 2018, p. 584). Such practice recognises the vitality and validity of voice by encouraging candor, vulnerability, and self-criticality, enabling us to enter deliberation on aspects of learning experiences that are essential to a healthy teaching culture.

Historically traced in the genealogy of scholarship by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983) among others, reflection and reflexivity are long-standing cornerstones of teacher education. In this case, reflection is defined as the act of becoming self-aware, a necessary state of inner objectivity that leads to reflexivity; reflexivity in turn is a process of engaging in relational contexts, of inter-subjectivity with a critical perspective, examining how we are always implicated in shaping events and experiences (see Brown, Sawyer & Norris, 2016; Freda & Esposito, 2015; Cunliffe, 2004; Matthews & Jessel, 1998). The focus of this chapter concerns how intense reflexive practice combined with arts-based inquiry produces stories of becoming based on social reality. Much as Richardson (2001) advocated, such storying defines the nature, enactment, and idealism formative in teacher identities, and it is incumbent on researchers concerned with the nature of teaching to listen to, and respond to, those who are living the experience to ensure our field remains robust. In this story we trace how Ranya is becoming-community, drawing our attention to the tensions, challenges, and in-betweenness that emerged while navigating changing definitions of self in relation to the teaching profession, and how that self is implicated in community art education as public pedagogy, which necessitates a unique blend of responsibility, dedication, caring, and responsiveness in the classroom.

In this way reflexive practice serves as a form of verification, to borrow from qualitative approaches for a moment, in that the process of continually reflecting upon teaching provides a means to navigate, balance, and check inner biases that manifest in identity construction. Reminiscent of Lather’s method of getting lost (2007) as an ontological starting point, Ranya’s reflexive journey “produce[d] different knowledge, and produce[d] knowledge differently” by “inducing breakdowns in representing experience,” returning to that which was “missed the first time” as part of the responsibility we hold as teachers (pp. 13, 157). With a view that reflexive inquiry underlies identity construction,