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Commitments to a Community of Artistic Inquiry: Becoming Pedagogical through A/r/tography in Teacher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this inquiry is to investigate how a/r/tography is uniquely situated to enact, develop, and problematize ‘becoming pedagogical’ in an arts-based cohort in a teacher education program. This particular study purposefully grapples with visual and performing arts, in an elementary teacher education program, as teacher candidates ‘learn to learn’ how to inquire through their disciplinary and interdisciplinary frames of mind. We take the position that arts-based research adds to the diversity and complexity inherent in understandings about education and pedagogy. This research was infused through principles of teaching, music and movement, and visual arts education classes at The University of British Columbia. To learn about adopting an a/r/tographic stance in their journeys of becoming teachers, teacher candidates were actively involved in arts-based research workshops, the development of an art

exhibition, learning to infuse creative pedagogies across the curriculum, and sharing their arts-based research projects. Their art took the form of public performances with artistic (music, dance, drama, visual) representations of curriculum.

Featured in this essay are the stories of *becoming* of two pre-service teachers whose learning interwove basic notions of a/r/tography. Their work subsequently influenced the projects of hundreds of pre-service teachers since their experiences as teacher candidates. Through examining this form of praxis, we learned that pre-service teachers who embrace an a/r/tography project—as a mode of artistic expression, as the creation of mature works of art, and as reflective-reflexive inquiry—experience the most success during coursework, during practicum, and into their teaching careers. They possess an ongoing commitment to becoming a/r/tographers and expanding their careers and career paths through artistic inquiry. They are more open to change and professional growth. Moreover, artistry—in the form of visual arts, music, dance, and drama—continues, being and becoming a strong influence in the identities of those individuals. The significance of this work expresses what happens when projects in university coursework shift to a professional perspective and to an embodiment of becoming a/r/tographic. The significance of enabling teacher candidates opportunities to work, both *with* and *as* teacher researchers—to create alongside others who are questioning ways of learning, knowing, and doing research; to engage with reflection in a deeply compelling manner—reaches beyond current, traditional conceptions of teacher education to a place of a community of learners engaged in artistic, creative inquiry. We suggest a substantial, artistic, creative shift in the conceptualization and practice of teacher education.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how a/r/tography is uniquely situated to enact, develop, and problematize ‘becoming pedagogical’ in an elementary arts-based cohort in the teacher education program at The University of British Columbia. A/r/tography is a hybrid form of practice-based research within education and the arts. Drawing upon the professional practices of educators and artists, our present work asserts that educators and artists who use a/r/tography within a teacher education context can be engaged in inquiry that uses their artistic and pedagogical sensibilities and capabilities in ongoing, disciplined, community-engaged, dialogic forms of research. Pursuing an ongoing state of ‘becoming pedagogical’ requires a commitment to learning, inquiry, curiosity and the courage to change. This particular study purposefully describes a fine arts and media education cohort in a generalist 12-month after degree elementary teacher education program in which instructors work with teacher candidates to embrace not only learning to teach, but more importantly, ‘learning to learn’ through their disciplinary and interdisciplinary frames of mind. Often, teacher

candidates believe they will become teachers by completing a teacher education program. In this study, the emphasis is placed on ‘becoming pedagogical’ where educators embrace a constant state of coming to know through living inquiry. Living inquiry is a commitment to an embodied engagement with the world that often includes creative forms of interpretation and representation. Using a/r/tography as both a pedagogical strategy and a research strategy enabled us, as instructors and teacher candidates, to think deeply about what it means to be in a constant of ‘becoming pedagogical.’

As a concept, ‘becoming’ is not new to educational literature. One may trace notions of becoming to the work of Rogers (1961), Allport (1955), and Overton (1984). They thought of becoming as change, specifically, developmental change of the human as the human lives in and through their environment. In this sense, change is linked to discontinuity, change is emergent (Lerner, 2002), and change is directed toward some goal, some direction.¹ Humanist psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) sums it up his notions of becoming as follow: “The good life is a *process*, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination ... The process seems to involve an increasing openness to experience ... It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life” (p. xx).

Becoming pedagogical builds on Rogers’ early work but is slightly different. Rather than thinking about the process of becoming being directional, it is multidirectional with a view toward embracing the potential of the experiences at hand. A/r/tography is well suited to this because creative and pedagogical inquiries often reach out into multiple directions before focusing on particular aspects of inquiry (Irwin, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008; Gouzouasis, 2005, 2011). Moreover, a/r/tography encourages groups of individuals to inquire together, underscoring the rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) nature of inquiry within a community of individuals. Researching communities of a/r/tographers, Irwin (2008) identified four commitments that appear to be needed: (1) a commitment to inquiry, (2) a commitment to a way of being in the world, (3) a commitment to negotiating personal engagement in a community of belonging, and (4) a commitment to creating practices that trouble and address difference.

¹ These ideas may be traced to notions of change in the work of Hegel (i.e., through dialectic change) and the phenomenologist philosophers Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (i.e., through notions of temporal awareness and embodied action). Not to be overly simplistic, for Overton (1984), change is necessary and humans evolve (i.e., become, in one way or another) over the lifespan.

The Fine Arts and Media in Education (FAME) cohort embraced these commitments and while the teacher candidates possessed backgrounds in dance, drama, music and visual art, it was the community (cohort) that provided the space for notions of interdisciplinarity to emerge. The instructional team immersed the cohort in community-engaged, differentiated learning with strong influences of Tribes learning communities (Gibbs, 2001) and instructional intelligence tactics, strategies, and graphics organizers (Bennett & Rohlheiser, 2001; Gouzouasis, 2011) across the curriculum, while ensuring a/r/tography was used as a pedagogical strategy for their own interdisciplinary learning. For them becoming pedagogical, or learning to inquire as teachers and as artists, was liberating yet challenging. It forced the teacher candidates to rethink what they were doing in their teaching practices as well as their artistic practices in and of themselves (see also Irwin, in press; Irwin & O'Donoghue, 2012). As a result, they were more able to provide opportunities for K-7 students to have similar creative, reflective experiences. What was most compelling was witnessing teacher candidates become active learners; they did so as they embraced acts of creative, artistic, pedagogical, and research inquiry.

A Review of Related Literature

While few studies exist in the education research literature that use either a/r/tography or related forms of art-based educational research in the development of new teachers, there are a handful of related studies that use the arts and an arts-based educational research lens to explore the possibilities of such applications. For the purposes of this paper we concentrate on two broad areas that informed our work: narrative story telling and visual inquiry.

Bullough & Pinnegar (2001), Carter (1993), Loughran (2005, 2006), Craig (2006), Strong-Wilson (2006), Skerrett (2008), and McClanahan (2008), among other educational researchers, describe the centrality of narrative story telling as a powerful tool in the study of teachers and teacher education. While we acknowledge that “Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18), new forms of research and tools of creative expression extend traditional notions of story into a broader spectrum of artistic representational forms.

While narrative story telling is important for teaching and learning, so too is visual inquiry. Marín & Roldán (2010) examine the use of photography as a research tool by questioning, or problematizing, the most effective use of photography in educational research, the ways to examine the types of image content relevant to particular kinds of investigation, and the ways that photographic research can be differentiated from other forms of educational research. Marín & Roldán stress the importance for researchers to present their photographs in series and present visual arguments in the forms of photo essays or discourses. They believe that

these types of organizational frameworks are important to the photographic research process because they reveal specific intentions and plans of the researcher, and because they enable visual interpretations and explanations of educational problems.

Whereas Marín & Roldán offer guidance for visual inquiry as a form of educational research, Hickman (2007) reports on a pilot project in which art and design teachers in training use visual art to report on classroom observations. This was a response to what he saw as a growing need for research through modes of knowledge representation other than writing. First, Hickman looked at an epistemological basis for considering visual art as a valid and valuable form of knowledge and as a useful mode of presenting educational material. He also examined the use of visual art as a research tool by novice researchers to report on their educational experiences. To evaluate the use of visual art as a reporting method, the novice researcher-teachers were asked to capture essential aspects of classroom lives through visual forms.

Hickman believes that visual art, as a form of research, enables us to capture the ineffable and help us to understand phenomena that are difficult to understand through words alone. That is because visual images demand our attention, engaging both affective and cognitive faculties. They enable us to report information in a more holistic way, enabling views of both part and whole and the involved connections and relations. Also, visual images give prominence to metaphor, analogy, and other visual elements that provide a rich yet economical and diverse source of information. Moreover, visual imagery may make what seems like a dull and uninteresting presentation of information more meaningful. Finally, for Hickman, meanings are more accessible through the use of shared visual conventions. Although commentaries aided in the understandings and meanings presented by the images, the primary source of information was contained within the images themselves.

Combining elements of narrative story telling and visual inquiry, Dixon & Senior (2010) included pre-service teachers in a ‘dialogical performance’ of pedagogy about curriculum and assessment through the construction of art that was thematically and conceptually linked to curriculum and assessment. They were interested in examining how an arts-based pedagogy supports (1) teacher understandings of pedagogy, (2) of the recognition of the place of identity in teaching, and (3) of the appreciation of differentiated learning. The purpose was to enhance perspectives of teacher education pedagogy through an arts-based educational research project. As theoretical framework, they employed Dewey’s (1938) concepts of art and experience and Eisner’s (1991; 1998) ideas of the connoisseur’s appreciation and critique. They take the position that arts-based research adds to the diversity and complexity inherent in understandings about education and pedagogy. Their research activities involved arts-based workshops and the development of an art exhibition as a site to display the artistry of teaching

and the ways that art making can provide access to meaning and understanding. The art took the form of public performances with visual representations of curriculum (i.e., all students created a visual artwork about curriculum theory) and assessment developed over the course of the study.

Dixon & Senior (2010) believe that the artistic creations and processes reflected the following concepts: (1) the abilities of students to construct understandings of pedagogy, (2) student recognition of the place of identity in teaching, (3) student appreciation of multiple ways of learning, and (4) the complexity of the social world of the classroom (p. 9). They felt the multiple understandings and interpretations of what it means to be a teacher in a teacher education program, and how engagements of agency and identity are negotiated and renegotiated through both artistic processes and processes involved in teacher education programs. By transgressing academic discourse, the authors felt the arts-based research opened access to spaces where learning and understanding was experienced in more complex, complicated, and connected ways.

The work we have cited helps us to understand the needs of our teacher candidates and the possibilities of arts-based research for inquiry over time. Our ‘becoming pedagogical’ a/r/tographic stance is elucidated by embracing the axiom that we live in a continuously changing world, and we acknowledge that our notions of what constitutes representations of “story” have changed, especially in the past 10 years with the introduction of user friendly, arts-based, transportable, digital media (Gouzouasis, 2006; Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2011).²

In the present study, and in consideration of Marín & Roldán’s work, we can see where their reflective photo essays are related to our work, and how we have developed the form of traditional teacher reflective essays into illustrated books, visual journals, digital movies, digital music compositions, and e-portfolios.³ While the product outcomes of Dixon & Senior were creatively impressive and educationally meaningful, they stressed the importance of process over products throughout the study. We align ourselves with this important

² We no longer live in fear of the perils of alternative forms of representation that were at the forefront of concern in the late 1990s (see Eisner, 1997)—the past 10 years of research, along with the evolution of digital technologies in the production and dissemination of arts-based educational research, empower 21st century educational researchers to expand the form, content, and process of what constitutes “research.” More than ever before, digital media provide us with ways to present and represent ideas rhizomatically.

³ In the Fall of 2001, FAME became the first group of pre-service teachers (36) in Canada to use iBooks in all university teacher education classes and teacher education practicum school placements (with 3 portable sets of 12 iBooks for use in K-7 classrooms), 24/7 (see Gouzouasis, 2001 & 2004).

distinction. Moreover, one may parallel our notion of ‘learning to learn’ with Dixon & Senior’s idea of “being more teachable” (p. 13).

In relating Galbraith’s (1991) work to our inquiry, we were constantly aware of the artistic knowledge levels of the FAME teachers (i.e., not all pre-service teachers possessed the same levels of expertise within and across dance, drama, music, and visual art) and grappled with the balance between content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, prior experiences in learning and teaching with the arts, reflective and reflexive capabilities of the new teachers, and their capacity to absorb, translate, and apply a research approach to their emerging practices. First and foremost, we recognize the gap in the literature and our inquiry became more process oriented and focused on evolution (i.e., becoming), moving beyond the use of art as a static vehicle to conduct research for both the pre-service teachers and ourselves.

Elaborating our Orientation

Our ‘becoming pedagogical’ project involved elementary music and visual arts education classes at the University of British Columbia, as well as communications and principles of teaching courses taught through an (1) environment saturated with creative instructional and learning strategies (Gouzouasis, 2011), (2) a focus on integration as a process rather than product, (3) play and imagination, and (4) creativity that the Arts bring to education to influence the ways we live and learn. In developing an understanding of what it means to be “becoming pedagogical,” we were interested in understanding how teacher candidates incorporate a/r/t/ography as a strategy for *learning to learn* within a teacher education program. In contrast, teacher education has been primarily focused on learning to teach. Ongoing learning, or adaptation, is essential to living systems as “they unfold recursively by constantly invoking and elaborating established associations” (Davis, Sumara & Luce Kapler, 2008, p. 201). Learning “involves moving into and through an evolving space of possibility” (p. 83).

For pre-service teachers who possess strong artistic backgrounds and beliefs in the transformative power of the arts across the curriculum, learning is more than playing “with” the box—it is about playing in, around, out of, and on the box in the same ways that children play with the box that is seemingly discarded when their parents’ bought a new television set. It is about imagining—a puppet theatre, a play house, a lemonade stand, a secret fort—and re-imagining—a rolling tractor, a cement mixer, a magic carpet, a sled—both in metaphor and in reality, the spaces and places that can be created from a discarded delivery box, a collection of found sounds in a creative soundscape composition, or an elementary school classroom.

It is through an evolving (s)p(l)ace (deCosson, 2004, p. 147) of possibility that this arts-based teacher education project, with a focus on a/r/t/ography, offers an opportunity of becoming

pedagogical. The practices of “becoming” artists, researchers (through deeply reflective-reflexive praxis), and creative teachers are experienced both continuously and contiguously—in spaces, places, and time—disrupting traditional teaching practices and the arbitrary boundaries of fixed disciplinary knowledge. Through an a/r/tographic lens, teacher candidates experience the generative flow of knowledge in the spaces between, within, and around these practices. This is another way that they may learn to learn, as they adopt a teacher-learner/learner-teacher orientation, as they become pedagogical.

Becoming pedagogical is a phrase we use to connote a state of embodied living inquiry whereby the learner is committed to learning in and through time and space, with an emphasis (i.e., weight) placed upon creative flow. In this way, we metaphorically bring the work of Rudolph Laban (1971), and his notions of weight, flow, space and time into play. This living inquiry is becoming pedagogical as the teacher candidate questions her intentions and actions as they relate to contextual artefacts and experiences acquired throughout the program and documented in a variety of ways (e.g., autobiographical inquiry, self-study, an a/r/tography research project that included both narrative and digital expressions, an illustrated book, a music composition, an e-portfolio). Processes of creating and performing identities transformed the concept of learning into the construct of ‘becoming pedagogical’. This is especially important as teacher candidates engaged with their personal and social aspects of knowing. By conceptualizing the identity of the teacher candidate (see Britzman, 2003) as an artist-researcher, living inquiry becomes a place for the teacher candidate to learn skills of observation, questioning, analysis, and interpretation.⁴

In our experience with FAME pre-service teachers over 10 years, it also involves a (s)p(l)ace for teacher candidates to (re)negotiate their identities as artists (i.e., musicians, painters, dancers, actors) as they move from desiring to ‘be’ a teacher as expert to ‘becoming’ a teacher as inquirer. As Britzman found, and our work concurs, as “teachers view their work as research, it becomes more difficult to take the dynamics of classroom life for granted” (p. 239). It is this active, living inquiry that we are calling becoming pedagogical for teachers should be in a continuous state of inquiring, of engagement, with learning as pedagogues. Yet this study goes even further.

A/r/tography offers a materiality, a physicality, and embodied approach to learning, that isn’t addressed by many teacher education researchers. It also offers processes—ways of thinking and knowing—that are rooted in the arts. Action research is often employed in teacher

⁴ In an a/r/tographic context, living inquiry may be conceived as practice-based research.

education programs as a way of encouraging inquiry. We employ a/r/tography as a hybrid form of research that embraces both the arts and education as forms of inquiry. The two pre-service teachers who participate in authoring the present study are ‘becoming pedagogical’ by shifting from desiring to ‘be’ an artist (e.g., an actor, musician, poet, dancer, painter, photographer) as expert to ‘becoming’ an artist as inquirer, from desiring to ‘be’ a teacher as expert to ‘becoming’ a teacher as inquirer. From this perspective, learning entails change on multiple levels across multiple identities. The complexities of becoming pedagogical as an arts educator must include a shift in understanding oneself as a pedagogue, and as a pedagogue who is also an artist. The objective of this program reformation is to create a community of inquiry where teacher candidates are committed to ‘becoming pedagogical’ as they prepare to advance and apply creative inquiry in schools.

The Inquiry Setting

We are able to share our understandings through two case studies of elementary program teacher candidates, Emily and Alexandra. Several instructors and faculty advisors in this cohort⁵ integrated a/r/tography throughout their courses and encouraged the teacher candidates

⁵ As a point of reference, pre-service teachers in the Fine Arts and Media in Education (FAME) cohort began the one year teacher education program with a four day orientation that focused on the centrality of the arts in our lives, as well as in education. It is a coming together of like-minded, artistic individuals from various walks of life. Without specifically pointing to particulars, the group experienced (1) a variety of artistic activities, (2) creative, artful community building activities, and arts-based research infused inquiries that led to a culminating song-movement-dramatic performance at the Capilano Salmon Hatchery, inspired by sock puppets and ocean inspired collages along the backdrop of 150 foot tall cedars and hemlocks along a roaring river. The importance of play (see Singer & Singer, 1990; Gouzouasis, 2006)—through readings, discussions, and activities during that first week—provides another powerful theme that influences the ways FAME pre-service teachers ‘become pedagogical.’ It enables the new teachers to dissolve the boundaries of learning that they may have experienced as a child in traditional schools and to free themselves of inhibitions gathered in their undergraduate programs—it encourages them to see, think, feel, and experience learning through the mind’s eye of a child.

Along with numerous songs, song games, play party dances, movement activities, and instructional intelligence tactics, strategies and graphics organizers (Bennett & Rohlheiser, 2002; Gouzouasis, 2011), one of the central creative activities of the orientation week was a three hour filmmaking activity (similar in feel and concept to a “24 hour film race”), where the pre-service teachers, in groups of six, were only provided with a digital video camera, an instruction sheet of five conceptual prompts and one rhythm instrument; they were invited to go anywhere they’d like to film their movies, and assign roles of director, camera operator, actors, and film editor. With minimal formal instruction and prompts, they learned to use and creatively apply digital media the way that children learn—through play. Based on these types of activities and discussions on learning and student-centered learning and teaching, Peter was able to observe and predict, early on in their teacher development, the creative potentials and reflective skills that many of the students possessed for expression through music, movement, drama, and digital expressions.

to take this disposition into their practicum. Peter, the coordinator and a lead teacher of the cohort, is a tenured faculty member who composes and performs music regularly in the Vancouver area. Rita was involved as a research collaborator and guest lecturer who helped introduce and refine teacher candidate learning about a/r/tography.

The personal stories of two pre-service teachers constitute the data of this paper from which we will further elaborate our perspectives and outcomes. Briefly, Emily Miles came into our program with a BFA and experience teaching English overseas. Alexandra Gordon possessed a BA in psychology and experience teaching career and personal planning to secondary students. Their stories herein reveal much more. Given the impact and importance of their narratives, as well as the import, maturity, insightfulness, and resonance of their voices, we have chosen to include their stories as wholes rather than splice and edit them into discrete data packets. Our work is harmonious with research that encourages research participants to “engage in personal relationships with authors/researchers, to think of themselves as co-researchers, to share authority, and to author their own lives in their own voices” (Ellis, 2004, p. 46). Thus, Emily and Alexandra share their stories with us as a/r/tographic collaborators.

Emily’s Reflections on her A/r/tographic Process: Post-practicum and One Year Later

I think the FAME group heard Donal O’Donoghue’s presentation quite a bit earlier than we were assigned the a/r/tography project. But his work made a real impression on me. I remember seeing other projects and talking about the a/r/tography project in the beginning of the second term, and there was a lot of confusion around how would this actually look and what were we expected to do. Because it’s such a personal project, people had a hard time getting a handle on what was being assigned. I also remember thinking back to his work and using it as a way of keeping my mind on what the point of the project: he had taken something personal and applied it to his own teaching life, and

Early in their learning, all the pre-service teachers in the FAME cohort were asked to write an autobiographical composition for their music-movement-drama class. An essay by Elliott Eisner (1991) was chosen as the inspiration point from which they would begin their pedagogical journey. All the pre-service teachers were asked to read not only the content of Eisner’s story, but to be mindful of the ways that he told his story and apply them to their own experiences with the arts in general, and music specifically, in their lives. They were also made aware of the ways that autobiographical research is being used in contemporary contexts (see Sparkes, 2005) and given additional references to read if they were so inspired. This paper was their first experience in the teacher education program with thinking about new forms of research—particularly autobiographical and autoethnographical—and foreshadowed the narratives they represented in their a/r/tography project.

creating a successful artwork in its own right. I asked myself: How can I take something personally from my life and make it a piece of artwork that I feel stands on it's own as a strong piece of artwork, not just a schoolwork project? That was a big motivator for me, not just doing something to satisfy the project or get the next assignment checked off my list. So I was thinking, "Okay if I'm going to do it at all, I want to do it properly and have a piece of artwork that I'm proud of as well." So that was what I recall from the beginning.

The BEd program year was insane, I mean, we were so busy with things that I basically put my own personal art practice on hold and any people who contacted me about any artwork or anything like that, I said, "You just have to wait until August, I'm not doing anything." When the opportunity to be artful arrived, I said, "Well if I'm going to do it, I'm really going to do it. I'm not just going to some sort of half-hearted attempt at an art piece." I was glad to have motivation to create some art.

The Haiku study⁶ was an interesting one, and it was also a creative inspiration. As my classmates and I talked about a/r/tography ... we were trying to get our heads around what to do and it was such an unfamiliar thing to think of Haiku as research data and analysis ... I mean, the traditional idea of research is so cut and dry and art just has no place in it - but just the idea of qualitative versus quantitative data - that's something that took some getting used to. The idea of using Haiku as a way of representing research results really kind of made me think, "So my art can be research? Really? Really?" I found your work (Peter) was the one where I said, "Wait a minute, Haikus for research?" So I think that was something that really got me thinking about really getting free and thinking, "Okay, I don't have to figure out some way to make an artistic survey?"

Thinking back, I was pretty sure that I'd end up drawing on something from teaching overseas because that was where the bulk of my experiences with a classroom came from. Starting from my experience I felt I could offer a more genuine and deeply felt teaching experience. I did a lot of - I don't know if this makes sense - but, unconscious thinking, sort of just thinking, "Well, okay, this is what a/r/tography is about. What kind of stuff have I taught?" I remember looking through photo albums from the schools that I taught at and then looking through my sketchbook from that time and I had these pictures that I'd drawn of a little girl. I felt a disconnection between the images related to the experience of teaching her and the experience of her being ill and visiting her in

⁶ See Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009.

the hospital. I had created the images and had no idea what to do with them. I'd seen them somewhat regularly while flipping through old sketchbooks and thought, "Okay, what am I going to do with these?"

When it came time to do this project, I started flipping through the sketchbooks again and looked at the sketches and thought, "Okay, you know, even just looking at these and thinking about that story brings out a lot of emotion for me and every time I think about that, I can remember a lot about teaching her and teaching that group and I like these images and I want to do something with them, I've never found a home for them." So even though only one section of the image in my sketchbook ended up being actually reproduced in the book, that section was the seed of the book.

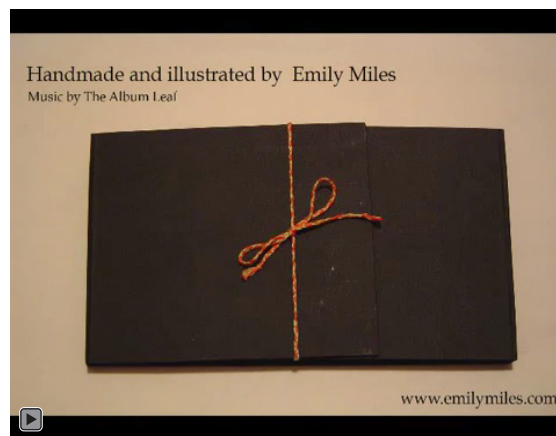
I knew I wanted to make a book. The intimate, tactile, and narrative qualities of a book have interested me since the final year of my undergraduate degree and it felt like a good fit for this piece. The book structure of two spines, which I refer to as 'double binding,' is something I had tried before. This first effort showed me the potential relationships between the facing and overlapping pages. I also realized that this process would be unfamiliar and unusually complex, which was both a daunting prospect and an appropriate metaphor for teaching. In planning the illustrations, I wanted to blend my drawing style with Irene's. I also wanted to tell the story as simply and briefly as possible; I tried to remove anything that wasn't necessary. For example, the page of clouds is meant to convey my return to Canada from Taiwan. During the planning stages, I realized that clouds were all that was needed. I have collected a few books of traditional Chinese painting and always enjoyed the ribbon-like way the clouds were drawn. By drawing the clouds transitioning from Chinese-style to Western-style clouds, I felt this told enough. Without knowing me, the reader would likely never guess that I taught in Taiwan specifically, but this is not essential to the story.⁷

Several symbols developed as I planned the illustrations. The clouds were one, as was the double-binding of the book. Initially, I'd planned my side on the right and Irene's on the left. As I built my first dummy book, I realized that switching the sides would put my story on the side of the book that opens in the style of traditional Western books, while placing Irene's story on the left would be a traditional Chinese opening. The rabbits became a symbol as I planned the illustrations. Irene told me her drawing showed her friend with "rabbits in her tummy." I mimicked Irene's drawings in the illustrations. At first, I planned to draw Irene standing with additional versions of her to demonstrate

⁷ A blog post that Emily wrote, and the video, may be found at <http://www.emilymiles.com/306>

the rampant multiplication of her own cells. When I began my research, I found a collection of artwork by children with cancer.⁸ One child described his painting as “the bunnies in his head.” Rabbits became an intriguing metaphor for the multiplication of cancer cells, as in ‘breeding like rabbits.’ Finally, as the components of the book came together, I realized that endpapers were necessary (since I had miscalculated the number of blank pages at the beginning). I visited my favourite local paper shop, hoping something would jump out at me. I found the lovely red and gold paper, which reminded me of blood cells. When I returned to the studio and braided the embroidery thread closure, I realized that the colours were significant, both for me and in Chinese culture. I associate red with blood, while red is a lucky colour in Chinese culture. I am blonde, and this translates as golden hair in Mandarin, but the colour gold is also associated with wealth.

Making the book involved careful, thorough planning but culminated with sudden action and risk. Once all the folios, endpapers, braid, spines, book covers and book cloth were prepared, they had to be pasted together rapidly. Once everything had been pasted together, I had to wait for everything to dry before checking nothing had gone drastically wrong. In my research essay, I discuss the difference between preparing and planning. Making this book felt much the same way. I prepared with care, but could not plan the end result with certainty.



I think in a lot of ways, the a/r/tography part of my practice influenced my practicum. My school advisor was incredibly supportive of having art in the classroom already. She was kind of the go-to art person, and yet when she found out that I was a practicing artist with an art degree, she felt she should defer to me, at least ... especially on

⁸ See Tusa, 1998.

questions of technique and what not even though she was certainly more than capable of holding her own. But it was kind of nice for us to feel like the art team for the whole school, where teachers would come and ask us, “How can I do this? How can I make this? Do you want to come and show my class?”

There were opportunities for me to bring my own artwork in when we were talking about artwork, and I think as far as the students were concerned that gave me a lot of credibility when I looked so much younger than their teacher and they knew I hadn't been teaching very long because I was a teacher candidate — I was still in school to become a teacher—so who was I to come in their classroom? Yeah, to be able to come in and go, “Here's a canvas I made and here's some things we're going to try together.” The kids would ask me, “So are you a real artist?” “Well, yeah, and so are you, so let's go.” It gave me a lot of credibility that way, and I think the parents were quite excited to find out that I had an art practice of my own and it may have.

One year later, I think a/r/tography might still be somewhere in the back of my mind. It's funny because when I received the email talking about how you [Peter] wanted to meet, it did kind of give me pause. I thought, “Oh my gosh, what am I going to say? I don't even think I've looked at that book in six months.” But then I started thinking about being a teacher on-call (NB: a 'TOC' is a substitute teacher). It is so difficult to go into a classroom and try and strike up some sort of relationship so that you can have a day that's enjoyable for everyone involved. But thinking about the core of my paper, the thesis of my paper as being about learning from students, in many practical ways, a TOC definitely has to do that.

My artistry influences how I think about things. I'm a pretty detailed oriented person, and that is noticeable in my artwork and my teaching. I desire a routine and I think the younger the kids are, they enjoy some sort of consistency of routine. A lot of my artwork is very repetitive: I draw the same backgrounds ... even in my book, I was drawing the same two characters over and over again. You know, having to draw the same image over and over, I think that plays itself out as a routine. When I come into unfamiliar classrooms, I have a discussion with the children because I want to help keep their routine the same. I always introduce myself the same way. As far as learning from a wider community, I also learn a lot from going into all these teacher's rooms and just seeing, “How does your day plan look? Or, do you have a day plan? What did you leave me? Where do you keep your stuff? Does your classroom look welcoming? Does it feel welcoming for me? Does it feel welcoming for the students? Why and how?”

Reflections on Alexandra's A/r/tography Process: Post-practicum and Two Years Later

I remember very vividly that finding a topic for the a/r/tography project was a tortured process where I just kept going back and forth about, "Do I want to share my past? Is this project worth me going into my deepest soul? Or should I do a more on the surface type of project?" I was trying to think of a way that I could do it without giving away too much of my history. I was a teacher candidate, with a fresh start and I was a new person working on a new degree and I wasn't sure I wanted to go there. But the more I thought about it, I just knew that I had to, that it was more for me than for anyone else, that it was important to do. If I'm doing an autobiography of me and I want to talk about something that I can use to help future generations, it's got to be the addiction aspects of my experiences. That's what I understand and that's what I know, and that's partly what made me want to become a teacher.

I really got my first hint that I could be a teacher when I was volunteering at my old high school talking to kids about drugs. There's a clip of that in my project film, of the letters they sent, saying "Thank you so much," and that they thought it was really amazing what I came to say. Even though as a teacher I can't share that with my own students, I know that I can go about it in a roundabout way and improve their self-esteem. So that ended up being what the a/r/tography project was about — using my personal knowledge to create a pre-emptive activity to help kids feel better and have greater confidence going into high school.

I found the presentations that professors did on a/r/tography very confusing — I just remember the lady with the flute and poetry that was so 'out there' that it didn't seem like anything any of us could really do.⁹ So I remember the flutist, and I think there was another one that we saw, and then we read an ethnodrama that you (Peter) wrote and that was sort of confusing too.¹⁰ We just weren't really sure how to simplify a/r/tography into something that teacher candidates could do. I think it was a bit theoretical, and I think if it had been broken down into steps it would have been a bit easier to sort of think about from our own perspective how we could do it, but to first be introduced by these examples, it seemed like, yeah, very theoretical.

⁹ See Ramsay, 2009, for an example of work by this flutist, arts researcher. Lorna Ramsey frequently performs her texts with music interwoven in the textual narrative.

¹⁰ See Gouzouasis, Henry, & Belliveau, 2008.

Thinking back, I guess if you start with the research paper that's a good place to start, so get your research question and write your paper and then, parts of the paper would have to be added in later. But it just made more sense to me to know—to know what my paper was going to be about before planning my artistry and teaching. Then again, it seemed simultaneous too because the painting sprung from the idea of the kids making an abstract painting representing themselves. That image ended up being the cover of their book. Yeah, and the 'Resu-Me,' that one, it's like a resume, but it's all about "me."

So, I definitely took a risk, and I felt maybe I was sharing too much. I know I just really did it for me, and I thought, "Okay, my artistry, I need to do a painting."

I like everything very clear: "Okay, I've got my idea to do a painting and I guess I need to start with a research topic." I researched self-esteem and I found one book that was called "Project Self-Esteem," which became my main resource. As the movie I composed opens you see the cover of that book that says "Project Self-Esteem." And there's two parts to the iMovie—the first part is where I'm reading my paper and talking about my research. And all of the clips are mostly pictures from my past, so I sort of start by narrating my past. So there are pictures from high school, and then you see some images of when I was sort of doing my downward spiral. I have photos of a couple poems that I had written during that dark time. There's one poem that says, "Every junkie is like a setting sun," and "My smile is broken most of all," things like that that sort of reflect the downward spiral I lived.

Getting back to the project, I think it's important to have the 'real' research question. And for me, I was arguing that building self-esteem when the students are young will help them make better choices later. That was the "R" in the center of the "A/R/T." I realized later I could not have done those paintings without a research question, but in my mind I thought, I need a visual art project and I thought the iMovie was more just a presentation. I felt just tremendous pressure because I wanted to talk about my past and I wanted to let that affect my teaching in some way. I knew it was such a big part of me, but I just wasn't really comfortable doing it, even when I showed this movie I said to my university classmates watching it, "Please don't talk about this outside of here." I just really wasn't comfortable. I knew the teacher education program was a fresh start, I knew I might be judged, and I felt it was just weighing on me. So the top of the painting is all black, and then there are ridges, kind of 3D ridges that come out of the painting, that I used concrete-type material to do, and that represented the struggle between the two aspects of my life breaking through that barrier ridge. Underneath is all a light blue colour representing the ideal me and the 'me' that I

always knew I was, but I had all this baggage and stuff that I had to work through. The painting just represented all the inner turmoil I was dealing with personally.



I took this idea into my two-week practicum—that became the ‘T’ part of the project. I discussed it with my School Advisor, who had been in FAME herself nine years ago, and she loved it. Susan, my ‘SA,’ said this was a perfect thing for me to do every September with my students because they’re getting to know themselves and each other. I think it’s important to build self-concept, just defining who you are. So that’s what they were able to do, and then it helps them get to know each other, because they can do a ‘gallery walk’ at the end. The unit ended up being completed by having a book, so we bound the book with yarn and you can see that in the film. The cover of the book they made is an abstract painting, which relates back to my abstract painting that I made that was my artistry.

I had this big poster, “How to make an abstract me,” and talked about brush strokes and how those would represent feelings. And we had to think about what type of brush strokes the kids wanted to do, like long and smooth or sort of sharp and jagged, and how strokes represented how they feel. I explained how the colors also needed to represent aspects of themselves. They put that onto the cover of their book, and then inside the book there was a tree, on the theme “How am I like a tree?” And it was just amazing to see how metaphorical they all were. One student said, “My tree is small and little and there’s a stream beside it because I give back to the fish.” After their tree they had a poem, a “Who am I?” poem. That worked out really well. They also wrote a mind map with their name and then positive things about themselves and put it in

their journals. The 'Resu-Me,' that was another piece of the journal that's like a resume, but instead of listing your accomplishments you're listing just really great things about yourself and things that you care about.



I think I was just so lucky that I had free reign to be able to use the project in the short-practicum, because we were all getting to know each other—the grade 6/7 kids, my SA, and me—and it was a fun activity, you know, making a “Me” book. I think the kids loved it, and you know, they all got to do the voiceovers for the iMovie too and they got to see that—that was the second part of the movie, and they got to see that part of the film. So they just thought it was a great project, and I think they had a lot of respect for me going into the long practicum when you have to teach science and math and all of the subjects.

In the first part of my movie, I was just trying to have a visual story about what led to my demise. Followed by how my life turned around. I show pictures of the Orchard where I went for rehab. After the Orchard photos, I show some of the cards I had gotten from my mom and my sister when I did my year sober. And there was one piece of paper in the film with pink highlighter on top that said “I’m so proud of you.” This was written by my boss when I asked for a day off to get my one-year sobriety cake at Bowen. I was going back to Bowen Island, and I was the first one from that facility they invited to come back and get their one-year cake. So, I was very proud. My rebirth type stuff was in the film, and then letters I got from friends saying that they had their friend back and they were so proud. And then there were some pictures of what the kids had written to me from those speeches I did at Crofton. One of them said, “Wow, what can I say? That was amazing. Thank you so much.”

What We Have Learned

As Noddings (1991) states, “Stories have the power to direct and change our lives” (p. 157). The stories of Alexandra and Emily have been used to introduce basic notions of a/r/tography and have influenced the projects of hundreds of pre-service teachers since their creation. Both teachers, Emily and Alexandra, have revisited their university FAME classroom and shared their notions of being emerged in an a/r/tographic process and how it influenced them in becoming pedagogical in ways that surpass the thought processes of most beginning teachers. For us, story is but one mode of knowing, of communicating one’s most personal thoughts, feelings, and images. It was through a variety of media thoughtfully woven into an intricate texture that made Emily and Alexandra’s a/r/tographic story telling process so exciting and revealing for us all. We believe that their commitment to the arts and personal artistry, to living a “good life” (Rogers, 1961), and to teaching and learning through an a/r/tographic lens, has guided them on a lifelong journey of becoming pedagogical.

More can be said about how a/r/tographic work transcends traditional notions of story and storytelling—especially when narratives are infused with visual and performing arts, both in digital and traditional expressions, in a space of living and becoming teachers, of becoming pedagogical. Pre-service teachers have experienced these in the form of personal and social commitments that were mentioned at the beginning of the present article, but as we hoped, because of the nature of becoming, more concepts emerged. As is evident in the stories of Emily and Alexandra, we are able to add to the body of literature on a/r/tography and extend the commitments mentioned at the outset of this paper. In ‘becoming pedagogical,’ we found that more commitments were employed, namely: (5) a commitment to becoming a/r/tographers through ongoing engagement in artistry and artistic pedagogy, and (6) a commitment to trusting the creative process. “Trusting the process is based on a belief that something valuable will emerge when we step into the unknown” (McNiff, 1998, p. 27). These notions of increasing trust, increasing openness to new artistic experiences, and an open awareness of self in experience—nested within notions of fluidity and change—also resonate in the work of Rogers (1961). In contrast with the work of Irwin (2008), these are personal commitments. Emily and Alexandra developed highly personal inquiries—they were not assigned topics for their project. As was gleaned from Emily’s reflection on her reflection, it was not merely about pre-service teachers trusting the process, but our trust in them to choose a topic and apply a unique research lens to their personal experiences.

Indeed, the following constructs are what we came to understand from our inquiry. First, pre-service teachers who embrace the a/r/tography project as a mode of artistic expression and who are capable of creating mature works of art may experience the most successes—during coursework, during practicum, and into their teaching careers. They possess a commitment to

becoming a/r/tographers and expanding their careers and career paths through artistic inquiry. They are open to change and professional growth.

Second, artistry—in the form of visual arts, music, dance, and drama—continues to be (come) a strong influence in the identities of those individuals. Emily's practice as an illustrator is clearly evident from the numerous books that she has illustrated and paintings she has created. That Alexandra was able to not only elaborate a compelling story in using a variety of modes of artistic representation, but also apply it to her practice as a beginning teacher and beyond, is an important testament to the power of the arts, arts-based educational research, and holistic thought in the unification of self-identity through artist-researcher-teacher. She continued to develop and expand her ideas to the point of saying, "I'd like to do a master's in counseling or arts education and do an a/r/tographic thesis" (Alexandra recently enrolled in a counseling masters degree program).

Working beyond the borders of classroom walls and maze-like hallways, in between programmatic structures, to a place where teacher candidates and teacher educators mingle, is a place called becoming pedagogical. We have experienced what happens when we move university coursework projects to a larger view, to a professional perspective, beyond the structures of courses and even programs, to the whole experience of becoming pedagogical through a/r/tography—living as an artist, educator, and researcher. It is within our community that storytelling became key form of expression—from autobiographies, to movies, to soundscape music compositions, to summative research projects and e-portfolios. Engaging with stories and sharing stories with peers and instructors enabled Emily and Alexandra to grow as a/r/tographers, storytellers of artist stories, and begin their teaching careers a/r/tographically. They would not necessarily have told their stories, these a/r/tographic inquiries, if they had not been provided the space and encouragement to do so; they would not have been as reflective and reflexive had they not been invited to engage, and continuously reengage with the research process.

Where we thought we were researching individuals' understandings of the particular, we have come to appreciate individual understandings of the particular nested within a collective—both in university and elementary school classrooms. The importance of enabling teacher candidates opportunities to work with teacher researchers—to create alongside others who are questioning, to engage with self reflection in a deeply compelling manner, to live artfully—reaches beyond current, traditional conceptions of teacher education to a place of a community of learners engaged in artistic, creative inquiry.

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