

Volume 30 Issue 2

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

rcééa

CJSAE Book Review

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: Nancy Taber
Special Edition Editors: Shauna Butterwick and Carole Roy
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

30.2 August/août 2018
ISSN1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

EMBODIED INQUIRY: WRITING, LIVING AND BEING THROUGH THE BODY

Celeste Snowber, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2016, 95 pages.

“I am not a text and cannot be distanced like words read on a page. Words don’t sweat or weep, moan or bleed. I do” (Snowber, p.3). Despite author Celeste Snowber’s depiction of written text as an often disparate aspect of human connection, in this book, she manages to artfully sculpt a manuscript in which the reader can discern the movement, breath, and scent of body-ness. This is a work of flow and tension, poetry and prose, written as a dance between two perspectives—that of the unnamed body itself, which speaks in first person, and that of Snowber as an observer, feeler, and commentator on embodied inquiry. Snowber, a faculty member at Simon Fraser University, is known to many in the arts-based research community for her unique, poetic and spirited contributions.

This is not a methodology text; it is a call and invitation for a way of being that, as Snowber argues, can inform all approaches to doing research. “There is not one plan, method or form to follow”. (p. xv) Snowber invites you to pick up the book, put it down, dip into the pages, take note of words and sentences. This book serves as a mischievous dare to all those who feel tentative, or doubt their inner body-wisdom, for those who yearn to align, connect, and reunite their adult forms of inquiry with childlike wonderment. The audience who could benefit most from Snowber’s book includes academics, researchers, and artists who have grown weary of both the Cartesian separation of mind and body, and the persistently oppressive exclusion of the flesh from the process of knowledge construction. Here you will find an impassioned argument about the body as knowing and source of knowledge written in provocative prose and poetry.

To say the book is “useful” for thinkers and creators is perhaps a gross insult to its central message: when we believe the dominant paradigm’s message, that the body is separate from the soul/mind/heart, we actually inflict a kind of wound on the body and a form of abandonment of it. Snowber is speaking as a body and calling us back, urging us to listen and heed its wisdom: “The body calls to you continuously, the body wants its subtle notes and bold proclamations to be listened to and honoured” (p. xiii). Thus, Snowber does not aim for this book to be useful in any pragmatic sense, because, as she seems to suggest, we already know how to *be useful* and how to *make use of things*. What we’ve forgotten, perhaps, is a sensuous existence in our own flesh:

You have been trained how to read and write. I am calling you back to a place where blood turns to ink, and flesh seeps into your words so they sing and pulse off the page, dancing into your readers’ hearts and minds

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
30,2 August/août 2018
ISSN1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

in a way that is truly re/membered. A kind of knowing that breathes vitality (Snowber, 2016, p. 10)

A few themes emerge in this text, which linger long after the words are finished. Among them: Childhood is a time when humans are at home in their bodies, and in adulthood there is an opportunity to return to that state. “It is time to make space for me as you did when you were a child. Abandon yourself once again to skipping rope and leaping frogs. Make noises and invent stories as often as brushing your teeth.” (p. 5) In a poignant poem about her son’s education, she recalls a phone call to the school on a snowy day when her son did not attend. They asked if he was sick, to which Snowber responded he was “under the weather” (p. 29). Snowber weaves a naturalistic and sensory image of what it is to be “under the weather,” feeling the snowfall through touch, taste, and smell, and the education that occurs when we allow ourselves to exist beneath the weather.

Snowber’s greatest interest in writing this book is to conjure up inspiration: to infuse research, inquiry, policy making, and daily life with a guiding light that originates from the notion of the body as home. She calls on her readers to trust the body and its sensual communications, and she implores her readers to cease the habitual and hegemonic marginalization of the body in acts of knowing. While reviewing this text, we both received poignant reminders of our embodiment. For Kari, it was an accident while doing field work in Uganda, which resulted in a fractured jaw, broken teeth, broken hands, and subsequent surgeries. Quite suddenly, her fieldwork experience became less about the data and more about her (broken/white/privileged/drugged) body’s relationship to the construction of knowledge. Shauna experienced a sudden onset of paroxysmal positional vertigo, leaving her acutely aware of how her body’s ability to move through space was not only about the strength of bones and muscles, but about tiny little crystals within the inner ear, which, when dislodged, leave you spinning and horizontal. And so we both resonate deeply with the following lines: “One fumbles into the pain and sometimes fumbles into the wonder. It is an improvisation in unforeseen territory. You must encounter the unknown to be known, the unforeseen to be seen” (p. 30). In some ways, Snowber’s book has given us permission or, perhaps more aptly—a loving nudge—to pursue the theorization of our body’s fragility. To bracket out our body’s experience from our living inquiries would be to leave out an entire “data set” that literally lives in our bodies as a story that demanded—and continues to demand—its own telling.

This book would be valuable reading for students beginning their graduate programs and for faculty pursuing their research programs, most particularly those in adult education and learning programs where there is now increasing attention given to how adult learning and explorations require attention to and recognition of embodied knowing. What would have strengthened Snowber’s text is references to the work of other scholars writing on this topic that would feed the curiosity of those students and faculty who find themselves yearning for other conversations about embodiment.

Celeste Snowber’s call to come home to the body is a mournful one, disappointed at the discontinuities and dissociations learned through adulthood and traditional academic inquiry. But more than mournful, she is mischievous and seductive—calling for her readers to jump in and “say yes to the grammar of the gut” (p. xiii).