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EDITORIAL

Kathy Mantas and Carole Roy

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Dedication

This special issue is dedicated to our dear friend, mentor and colleague, Dr. Solveiga Miežitis, (1937–2015).

LEARNING AND TEACHING: ARTFUL NARRATIVES OF TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Learning and Teaching: Artful Narratives of Transformation, a special issue of the Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, features ten articles, field notes, two book reviews, and a virtual art exhibition—a first for this journal—meant to complement and extend discussions on the theme of learning, teaching and transformation. More specifically, this issue brings together creative essays from diverse perspectives and disciplines, using multiple artful forms, to illustrate transformation in both formal and informal learning and teaching contexts. This collection contributes to the ongoing discussions on alternative and emergent approaches to transformative learning—a theoretical framework that continues to be crucial in adult education. As well, it invites us to consider the power of reflective, narrative, creative, and artful processes to give form to, communicate, and transform our complex, multi-layered, and colourful professional and personal (as well as collective) experiences of teaching and learning.

Résumé

Apprentissage et enseignement : les récits artistiques de la transformation, un numéro spécial de la Revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes, présente dix articles, des notes d'observation sur le terrain, deux critiques de livres et une exposition d'art virtuelle – une première pour cette revue – dont l'objectif est de compléter et d'élargir les discussions sur le thème de l'apprentissage, de l'enseignement et de la transformation. Plus précisément, ce numéro rassemble des textes de création provenant d'une diversité de perspectives et de disciplines et utilisant une multiplicité de formes artistiques pour illustrer la transformation dans

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les contextes d'apprentissage et d'enseignement à la fois formels et informels. Cette collection contribue aux discussions actuelles sur les approches non traditionnelles et émergentes à l'apprentissage transformateur, un cadre théorique toujours essentiel dans l'éducation des adultes. De plus, il nous invite à réfléchir à la force des processus réflexifs, narratifs, créateurs et artistiques pour façonner, pour communiquer et pour transformer nos expériences professionnelles et personnelles (et collectives) de l'apprentissage et de l'enseignement dans toutes leurs couleurs, complexités et multiplicités.

In the last decades, transformative learning has become an important theoretical framework in adult education. Several publications, for example, have explored transformative learning and teaching. Starting with the impactful work *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (2000), Jack Mezirow and others have since developed the theory of transformative learning in the context of adult education. In 2007, Ana Louise Keating focused on the importance of culture in *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues* and drew on Indigenous, critical 'race' and multicultural-feminist perspectives to demonstrate how teaching can disrupt the status quo and how the practice of teaching can be transformed through learning. In *Transformative Teacher Research: Theory and Practice for the 21st Century* (2015), Pamela Burnard, Britt-Marie Apelgren, and Nese Cabaroglu weave together research on teaching from various cultural contexts to advance the theory of teaching and learning through innovative practice. More recently, Timothy J. Shaffer et al. (2017) advocate for participatory, democratic and critical approaches to transform paradigms of teaching and learning in higher education in *Deliberate Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*.

At the same time, there has also been some attention given to narratives of transformative learning. For instance, in 2001, Annie Brooks and Carolyn Clark wrote *Narrative Dimensions of Transformative Learning* and use narrative to scrutinize not only the process of transformation but also the theory of transformative learning. In *Narrative and the Practice of Adult Education* (2007), Marsha Rossiter and M. Carolyn Clark recognize the centrality of narrative in many lifelong and adult learning practices, and explore theoretical foundations of narrative and their ability to deepen the learning and teaching process. In 2012, Mark Tennant looked at *The Learning Self: Understanding the Potential of Transformation* and invites us to experience new ways of thinking about how we learn and discusses in some depth the concept of the storied-self. Also in 2012, *A Recipe for Hope: Stories of Transformation by People Struggling with Homelessness* by Karen M. Skalitsky demonstrates how first-hand accounts have the power to reject misconceptions around homelessness. In *Transformative Learning Through Creative Life Writing* (2013), Celia Hunt considers the effects of creative non-fiction autobiography on adult learners' sense of self and suggests that creative writing, in the context of critical reflection, has the potential to transform the way we think and learn. More recently, in *Stories of Transformative Learning* (2014), Michael Kroth and Patricia Cranton examine the transformative learning process as shared by first-hand personal narratives.

Likewise, there has been some work on alternative/non-traditional and emergent approaches to transformative learning. For some the emotional, unconscious, soul, and imaginative realms are central to transformative learning (Dirkx (2001, 2012). For others, cultural-spiritual (Charaniya, 2012), holistic (Taylor, 2009), embodied (Clark, 2012), and

more integrated global and planetary perspectives (O'Sullivan, 1999, 2012) to transformative learning are stressed. Others still, advocate for artistic expression, aesthetic approaches, creativity and the arts for research, data collection, reflection, and representation of findings to foster transformative learning (Butterwick & Roy, 2016; Greene, 1995; Lawrence, 2012; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Mantas & Schwind, 2014; see also McLean & Kelly, 2010, 2011).

Although this review provides a brief overview of some relevant literature, it is not exhaustive. It does emphasize though that researchers in adult education have come to realize the importance of critical self-reflection and are increasingly valuing connections between theory and practice and narrative and arts-based texts that pay attention to the process of learning and teaching. With this collection we would like to add to the intersecting literature on narrative, transformative learning, and arts-based and creative forms. As well, we are interested in bringing forward experiences that highlight cultural, socio-political, and professional development with respect to teaching and learning. Our hope is that, through these evocative and accessible forms, we reach a broader readership, deepen our understanding of the complexities inherent in the processes of transformation with respect to learning and teaching, and gain further insights into the transformative power of narrative, artful and creative forms.

The narratives included in this special issue provide examples of transformation in the context of formal and informal learning and teaching using various artful forms (e.g., poetry, storytelling, journaling, letter writing, visual arts, creative non-fiction, ritual) and represent a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and voices. Also, they explore the powerful processes of reflection, narrative, and, at times, of various art forms to communicate personal and professional stories of learning and teaching. Furthermore, they raise questions of teaching approaches as well as identity and relationality as threads that connect learning and teaching in various settings: identity formation, personal development; resilience in the face of socio-political challenges; and relations with students and colleagues, to name a few. Here, the significance of story and art to the learning and teaching processes is acknowledged. The authors for this collection—current and recently retired professors, graduate students, and practitioners in various settings including adult education, teacher education, nursing education, mathematics education, peace education, linguistics, and a women's centre—offer insights that may resonate and provide the ground for a sense of connection with others in what is becoming a virtual world; and if not connection, then impetus for reflection.

The articles in this issue relate to each other under three main themes. The issue begins with the section, *Artful Teaching*. This section focuses primarily on learning and teaching using various approaches: photography to learn/teach about perspectives and a personal and professional transformative journey (Lawrence); poetry, love, loss, and mentorship in finding one's voice (Wiebe); self-knowledge, relationality, and presence for holistic education so students can process difficult emotions (Di Rezze); and immersive education in a Japanese peace education program that uses site visits, storytelling, meditation, and art (Nozawa). The second section is titled *Language, Culture, and Identity*. In this section we meet an ESL teacher who learned language and culture while living in Japan (Stephens); a Russian mathematician who immigrated to the United States and then Canada and had to learn about, and adapt to, different cultures as well as overcome unexpected barriers (Antropov); and a feminist from an immigrant family who drew on immigrant and Indigenous women's perspectives and researched stories of feminist activism (Chau). The third section, *Learning and Teaching through Collaboration*, includes a duoethnography and

a poetic discussion of race and race relations (Heavey & Jemmott); letter writing and visual representations about leading nursing students to their professional practice (Spadoni & Manankil-Rankin); and the use of contemplative arts in a shared exploration of wit(h)nessing, inter-relational healing, reciprocity, and teaching (Walsh & Bickel).

Learning and Teaching: Artful Narratives of Transformation also includes Field Notes from a Mexican student studying in a Canadian doctoral program who reflects on the role of teachers from a dominant society working with Indigenous people (Dominguez). In addition, we include a virtual art exhibition that is meant to complement this special issue as well as extend the discussion on learning, teaching and transformation. As Duxbury (2009) states, and we concur, "there are gaps...in the intersecting network of ideas, thoughts, images, and elements that make up the impetus for creating an artwork. These gaps provide opportunities for speculation and reverie and the possibility to include that which is not-yet-known" (p. 55), and that which we do not have words for yet.

The point of this special issue is not to provide one answer or a coherent perspective; yet, what emerges is the importance of reflection and sharing in learning and teaching, as well as the depth of challenges and changes learning can provoke. As we know, publishing is a collective endeavour. It has been an honour to work with a group of authors who bring such passion, vision, and commitment to their work. Their diligence in reflecting and sharing their experiences and insights, and their generosity of spirit in opening a corner of their lived experiences in such artful ways enriched us and we hope they inspire you by their creativity and the courage it took to dig deep into their own hearts and minds. We are also indebted to the numerous reviewers who so generously gave their time and provided helpful feedback on articles-in-progress.

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