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Nicole Anae
University of South Australia

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“Creative Writing as Freedom, Education as Exploration”: Creative Writing as Literary and Visual Arts Pedagogy in the First Year Teacher-education Experience

Nicole Anae
University of South Australia

The themed presentation at the Sydney Writers’ Festival on May 25, 2013 entitled “Creative Writing as Freedom, Education as Exploration” brought together three key players in a discussion about imaginative freedom, and the evidence suggesting that the impact of creativity and creative writing on young minds held long lasting, ongoing implications. This is a particularly crucial conversation given the factors stifling creative writing pedagogies in contemporary classrooms. In contributing to the ongoing dialogue about literary creativity, this theorized classroom-based discussion explores the integration of creative writing as literary and visual arts pedagogy among first year preservice-teachers developing an autoethnographic project. By modifying traditional autoethnographic methodology to include literary and Arts-based approaches to creative writing, the examination argues that, while “Creative writing is more than just words on a page; it’s freedom”, developing confidence and competencies among first year teacher-education students may prove important to the educational futurity of that philosophy.

The contributions by Professor Robyn Ewing, author Libby Gleeson and managing director Teya Dusseldorp to a presentation entitled *Creative Writing as Freedom, Education as Exploration* at the Sydney Writers’ Festival on May 25, 2013 highlighted both the significance of creativity and creative writing generally, but also the issues which threaten creative writing and stifle the nurturing of creativity in contemporary classrooms. Creative writing as freedom and its alignment with “education as exploration” spotlights the importance of students’ access to creative modes of self-expression particularly, not just in school classrooms, but also within teacher-education programs. What creative writing is and does within the scope of a discussion like *Creative Writing as Freedom, Education as Exploration* largely rests with the question: ‘Where does creative writing “fit”?’ within the curriculum—not only in school classrooms, but also within teacher education programs. If, as a corollary to *Creative Writing as Freedom, Education as Exploration*, “Creative writing is more than just words on a page; it’s freedom” (Sydney PEN, 2013), then the positioning of creative writing within teacher-education may prove significant in determining “how the creative and expressive arts are positioned within existing ‘knowledge economies’ (OECD, 1996, p. 7)” (Hecq, 2012, p.2).

‘Where does creative writing “fit” within school and teacher-education curriculums? This question comes to the heart of valuing, or devaluing, creative capital in its economic, cultural, societal, and pedagogic iterations. National curriculum documents are peppered with references to ‘creative’ and ‘creativity’ in a way that generally avoids specificity. In 2009, the phrase ‘creative writing’ appeared only once in the National Curriculum Board’s (NCB) ‘Framing Paper Consultation Report: English’, and then only in passing (p. 9). It is

missing completely, however, from the NCB's 'Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English' document released that same year. By 2013, the phrase reappears, again only once, this time in the National 'Draft F-10 Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Consultation Report' (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013, p. 22), and again only in passing.

"Creativity", however, is mentioned twice in ACARA's 'Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts', both times as an adjective form of the noun "creativity" (ACARA 2011, p. 5 & 21). "Creative" however, is mentioned 17 times in this document, largely as a noun rather than an adjective. There are 20 instances of "creative" and 16 instances of "creativity" in ACARA's 'Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Technologies' document, the latter term utilized purely as an adjective (ACARA, 2012). This rather ad hoc usage of "creative" and "creativity" in curriculum documents may reflect trends in curriculum planning where "creative" is typically paired with "thinking" to define a cognitive operation that brings together "the creative individual—free, spontaneous and unpredictable—and the requirement of an institution obliged to establish norms, objectives and predictable outcomes" (Cook, 2012, p. 99).

The legacy of this kind of dichotomy resonates in McGaw's (2013) claim that "In the early planning stages for the Australian Curriculum, *critical thinking* and *creativity* were treated as separate draft general capabilities. As the work progressed, it became difficult to maintain the distinction with the combined capability the result" (p. 8). Thus, what creativity 'is' and 'does' according to curriculum documents is, in the main, difficult to define with any real specificity. Here, certain words are "stretched"—to coin author Fay Weldon (2013)—in certain ways for certain ends. Weldon's musings about the term 'creative writing' being stretched to the point of misnomer is particularly telling. For Weldon, "creative writing" describes:

... the rather odd misnomer for a discipline currently taught in universities and from now on at A level ... (Misnomer, I say; inasmuch as a subject that once meant making up effective stories has stretched to mean anything a student strives to write elegantly and by implication, to sell. (Weldon, 2013)

I am not suggesting that "creative writing" has never been defined within Australian curriculum documents, but rather that the ideology about what creativity in writing is and does has been vulnerable to considerable conceptual stretching. One example, for instance, is the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) "'Focus on literacy: Writing' State Literacy and Numeracy Plan" (1999). While this document suggested that "*Creative writing* usually refers to an activity in the English key learning area", it followed with the rather perplexing claim "where the purpose is to entertain" (DET, 1999, p. 19). Further "stretching" can be seen in 'The Australian Curriculum', which asks students "to use personal knowledge and literary texts as starting points to create imaginative writing in different forms and genres" (ACARA, 2011, p. 9). Here, the term "imaginative" appears 75 times in this document; ambiguously to describe a set of undertakings (thinking, writing, reading, creating, learning, responding, etc.), but not actually a set of writing practices, processes or actions—although the term is stretched to imply they exist. "Imaginative" as a euphemism appears to have replaced the more specific noun "creative writing" (verb; 'creative writing') while maintaining certain outcomes of "imaginative" writing as prescriptive, for instance:

Create short imaginative and informative texts that show emerging use of appropriate text structure, sentence level grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and appropriate multimodal elements, for example illustrations and diagrams. (ACARA, 2011, p. 33)

And further, while the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) did produce a 'Creative Arts Academic Standards Statement' in February 2010, this document

only relates specifically to “learning outcome statements that can be applied to all bachelor degrees offered in the Creative and Performing Arts disciplines” (p. 4). This document is similar to the British Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) ‘Subject benchmark statement for English’ (2007), although this paper specifies of “creative writing” that:

... in addition to encouraging self critical practice, allows students to acquire many of the same aptitudes, knowledge and skills, but attain them to some extent through different routes. ... The original work produced by creative writing students is likely to be informed by wide and critical reading of existing literature, and to demonstrate precise attention to genre, form and audience (QAA 2007: 2). (Freiman, 2011, p. 10)

In each case however, both the ALTC and the QAA consulted their respective National bodies—the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) Higher Education Committee for the former, and, the National Association of Writers in Education (UK) for the latter—to define specifically the scope and sequence of creative writing in Arts-specific bachelor programs within tertiary education. The British Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) models its document ‘A-level Creative Writing Preparing to Teach’ (2013) curriculum on the teaching of creative writing in Universities: “It is hoped that the teaching of Creative Writing in secondary schools and colleges will in some ways mirror this practice, with teachers and students working together as writers” (AQA, 2013, pp. 6–7). This sentiment could provide a useful start-point for developing creative writing pedagogies both within the Australian secondary school setting and teacher-education programs.

“Creativity in education”, asserts Harris (2014), “is both different from other areas and harder to pin down due to education’s inherently risk-averse nature” (p. 3). Tertiary Arts programs aside, is the use of terms such as ‘creative’ and ‘creativity’ in national curriculum documents as descriptors rather than processes and actions at odds with what creativity is, does, and should be in actual classrooms? Perhaps Ewing articulates the current state of play best in her assertion: “It is all very well to give lip service to that [creativity], and indeed our Australian government does that ... [yet] we’re going in exactly the other direction in terms of what we are doing in classrooms” (Volz, 2013).

Writing Creative Writing

There exists emergent scholarship examining the utility of writing in various genres among undergraduate students to include alternative styles—such as fictocriticism (Hancox & Muller, 2011) and autoethnography (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2010). This also includes studies in self-narration, using autobiographies, and self-reflexive examinations of the postmodern self (Ostman, 2013). However, there is a critical gap in the scholarship about creative writing research specific to teacher-education. The body of literature about writing generally within teacher-education is now outdated but in the main explores and analyzes the benefits of developing reflective writing skills more broadly (Munday & Cartwright, 1990; Spilkov, 2001; Cautreels, 2003; Pedro, 2005). Traditional scholarship draws on research into narrativity in tandem with the application of journal writing (Russell, 2005) and “story-telling” in teacher identity studies (Schön, 1983; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Diamond, 1994; Heikkinen, 1998; Loughran, 2002).

Creative writing skills development is the exception rather than the rule in teacher-education programs generally despite the evidence that supporting creativity in beginning-teacher programs supports creativity in the school curriculum (MacLusky, 2011), and despite the evidence advocating creative writing’s potential to liberate creativity and present a powerful stimulus for self-expression (Appleman, 2011) and understanding ‘self’ (Thaxton,

2014). Naidoo (2011), for instance, explored writing/creative writing skills development among Indigenous Australian youth and concluded that not only did writing/creative writing facilitate social and literacy skills, but provided a vital medium to explore personal and community issues. In fact, writing/creative writing became “a powerful tool to open up communication and allow change to be initiated” (p. 11).

The overarching consensus that teaching writing is an important element in the learning experience could suggest that confidence in creative writing might hold positive long-term implications in the preparation of preservice teachers’ attitudes to writing as practice and pedagogy specifically (Hall and Grisham-Brown, 2011). For Ostrom (2012) creative writing is both a way of knowing as well as a way of knowledge creation (p. 84). This perspective implies that engaging beginning teachers in creative activities, such as creative writing, could effectively connect students’ learning as beginning-teachers to their personal lives and experiences as a mode of self-expression.

More recent scholarship is emerging that examines the use of autoethnography in teacher-education. However, the question of creative writing remains beyond their scope despite the potential of this methodology—the self as a form of data—to unify creative writing narrativity within a process of critically examining identity “from multiple perspectives” (Coia & Taylor, 2005, p. 27). Of the growing body of more recent examinations, one researcher uses autoethnography as a way of examining the experience of teacher-education and teacher-training from the perspective of beginning teachers (Hayler, 2011), while another utilized autoethnography to examine how individuals experienced particular cultural contexts via a specific teacher-training curriculum (Legge, 2014). Ricciardi too utilises self-reflection within an autoethnographic methodology to enhance progress through self-examination for pre-service teacher candidates and argues self-reflection within autoethnography as “an effective tool in professional development programs of seasoned educators” (2013). Vasconcelos (2011) occupies the rather unique position of preservice-teacher cum autoethnographer investigating “my second-nature teacher-student self” (p. 415). These studies in their own ways focus on the teacher as writer nexus, and the implications this development might have for encouraging students’ imaginative freedom through creative writing:

If young people are not learning to write while exploring personal narratives and short fiction, it is because we as educators need more training — or the specifics of the curriculum need development. It is not because those forms of writing in themselves are of no use. (Wallace-Segall, 2012)

Possible Deterrents to Implementing Creative Writing

That creative writing is not actually articulated using specific processes and actions within the National curriculum could explain why beginning-teachers are generally ill-equipped to teach creative forms of literary self-expression in a way that effectively serves the imaginative potential of creative literacies. Another factor perhaps influencing the implementation of creative writing as pedagogy in teacher-education is the question of the validity of creative approaches to writing and the question of measurement. The validity of creative writing is difficult to calculate in terms of quantifiable outcomes, that is, quantitative data measuring values typically expressed using numeric variables and values, and/or qualitative data as measurements of ‘types’ typically identified via linguistic, symbolic or numeric codes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). While Beard (2012) suggests that teaching a creative writing curriculum “as a set of established procedures” helps ensure meeting and achieving outcomes (p. 176), the outcomes of creative writing are often

unpredictable, often unknown in advance, highly individualized and distinctive, and can also depend on mode or genre used within the creative writing process, such as fiction, prose or poetry (Harper 2013). Morley and Philip (2012) argue that the process of creative writing itself is fundamentally and typically uncertain (p. 1) while Wandor (2012) asserts that the revisions to creative writing in a workshop setting is procedural and “based on the practice of piecemeal, symptomatically prescriptive adjustments to fragments of writing” (p. 57). It is interesting therefore that McLoughlin (2013) defines “creative writing in all its forms as a research methodology” given individuals must strategically select and deploy “an integrated set” of creative practices (p. 50).

Another potential deterrent to teaching creative writing is two-fold: a) that creative writing relies on the preparedness of teachers to teach creative writing (Milton, Rohl & House, 2007; Reid, 2009; Thompson, 2010; Blake & Shortis, 2010)—a preparedness which many classroom teachers may/do not have—; and b) that there exists an ongoing debate as to whether or not creative writing is actually teachable (O’Reilly, 2011; Wandor, 2012; Donnelly, 2012; Morley & Neilsen, 2012; Harper, 2013):

It is not easy to teach creative writing within the confinement of school. It is not easy to tackle the issues that arise, and it's not easy to learn how to teach fiction and memoir writing well. But it is possible. (Wallace-Segall, 2012)

However, the question of the teachability of creative writing should not be confused with the teachability of “creativity”. When Professor Robyn Ewing was quoted as claiming “creativity can’t be taught, but it’s there in all of us” (McInerney, 2013; Volz, 2013), she was not alone. Celebrated author Faye Weldon similarly claims “Creativity cannot be taught”, with the caveat, “Not if you define creativity as the urge to make something out of nothing” (2013). However, both Ewing and Weldon strongly advocate the teachability of creative writing. For Weldon, “If you’re asking can ‘creative writing’ ... be taught, the answer is ‘yes, of course’ ... You can teach the craft, if not the art.” There are also a number of existent scholarly works supporting this position exploring teachability specific to creative writing (Pateman, 1998; Conroy, 2002; Miller 2010; Vandermeulen, 2011; Munden, 2013).

If therefore, “Creative writing is more than just words on a page; it’s freedom” then the seeds of this freedom lies in changing attitudes—the policy, the personal, the pedagogy—about what defines creative writing and how it can be taught.

Changing the Trend

Engaging intending teachers in creative activities, such as creative writing, effectively connects students’ learning as beginning-teachers to their personal lives and how creative modes of self-expression might facilitate exploring “the intersectional nature of identity” (Alexander, 2014, p. 111). This kind of creative writing “happens inside language: because the artistic genres encourage playful engagement with the materiality of language” (Vandermeulen, 2011, p. 49). Creative writing as an integral process in autoethnography presents a powerful form of life writing with implications for exploring self-identity—an undertaking Neilsen (2014) suggests “tackles concepts of memory and identity while constructing a ‘self’ in order to make meaning of a life” (as cited in Morley & Neilsen, 2012, p. 5). It is the position of this paper that if, “to really *teach* creative writing is to negotiate the personal” (Vandermeulen, 2011, p. x), then autoethnography—as a way “to make meaning of a life”—presents a unique approach to developing creative writing confidence and self-narrative competence in the first year teacher-education experience. Raab (2013) argues that “An autoethnographical text merges the genres of autobiography and ethnography, where the narrator’s lived experience is at the core of the story” (p. 2).

What follows therefore is part case-study and part theorized account of a practitioner inquiry. This discussion first proceeds by identifying some of the apparent methodological concerns with autoethnography. This is an important undertaking in contextualizing ways in which the integration of strategic creative writing processes may address some of these concerns. Thereafter, the discussion includes examples and images of student writing samples as well as specific and critical examinations of students' innovations on texts (from written to creative object). That the creative writing techniques included here emerged as a result of teaching a course on identity and culture to first-year intending secondary teachers, determining the objectives of the course with respect to creative writing was quite specific, and therefore require explanation. The discussion concludes with a dialogue about future trends that may perhaps characterize an emerging movement toward interdisciplinarity between literary and intertextual pedagogies in teacher-education.

Autoethnography: Methodological Concerns

A number of researchers have identified various problems with autoethnography. Harper (2013) cautions of the risks of autoethnographic research descending into merely autobiography (p. 51) while Allen-Collinson (2013) overviews “those who view autoethnography’s focus on ‘self’ with deep suspicion and skepticism, accusing the genre of flirting with indulgent ‘navel-gazing’ forms of autoethnography” (p. 4). By extension, another criticism involves ensuring discrimination between autoethnographic writing as self-critical rather than self-indulgent (Muncey, 2010; Starr, 2010). A number of scholars however defend autoethnographic practice against claims of self-indulgence (Monaro, 2010; Gilbourne and Llewellyn, 2011):

Self-reflexivity demands that we reflect on past events that informed our subjectivities. It means also looking back critically at the ‘past’ of the ethnographic or qualitative research encounter. In addressing the mediated nature of memory, I do not make claims that memory can provide a mirror of the past; rather I *use* memory as a way of initiating the kind of identity work that is necessary to understand how, as individuals, we are historically situated ‘inside culture’ (Couldry, 2000). (Monaro, 2010, p. 104)

Ellis, Adams and Bochner also acknowledge that “For an autoethnographer, questions of reliability refer to the narrator’s credibility” (2011). Creative writing can address the issue of validity if bearing in mind Harper’s (2010) assertion that observation is often viewed as a primary outcome of creative writing (p. 14). Here, critical observation involves articulating an internal structuring through language that encourages a split in the researcher/students’ subjectivity; between the subject *in* language and the subject *of* language for the purposes of critical self-reflection in storying the self. This splitting through language takes its form, at least in part, in the student/researcher asserting their agency through deploying narrative point-of-view as a positioning device. This stylistic device determines the narrator’s proximity to the event being described (Bochner, 2012). Alexander (2014) defines first-person narratives as dialectical: a “subjective location” attempting to “name and analyze what is intuitively felt and expressed in the narrative (p. 199). Second-person narratives can invite the reader into the position of active witness of the author’s experience (Adams & Ellis, 2012). Finally, third-person narratives can act as a disassociating technique in which the proximity of the reader to the author’s account is indirect, separated or detached (Méndez, 2013).

Additionally, in terms of measurement, the final piece—the creative writing artifact—is not necessarily identified as an outcome alone, but rather as the end-result of a

process or expression of “acts and actions” which Harper (2010) defines accordingly: action as “a collection of acts, sometimes joined by logic, intuition or fortuitous circumstance” and act as “something done” (p. 14). Therefore, the question of measurement in creative writing is essentially a measurement of “creativity” (Barbot et al, 2011; Rababah et al, 2013), and by extension, if necessary subject to quantitative or qualitative analysis using, for instance, self-reporting achievement inventories (SAIs), so-called ‘product ratings’, or administering assessment methods such as the Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT) (Sawyer, 2012). An alternative would be to require that students produce a set of supplementary discourses in tandem with their creative writing work that critically reflect on individual works (Sheppard, 2012, p. 111).

Creative Writing as Autoethnography

The writing techniques explained in this discussion approach creative fiction as writing characterizing imaginative processes where the form of writing, or genre, corresponds with the fantasy themes and tropes of the narrative’s subject matter. Creative *nonfiction*, on the other hand, subjects ‘real’ experiences and/or remembered events to a literary treatment using typically ‘fictional’ forms to craft alternative versions of recollected experiences. In a pedagogic sense, both techniques—creative fiction and creative nonfiction—encourage the writer to deploy both discourse and disclosure as twin stylistic characteristics in self-narrative inquiry. Critic and philosopher Julia Kristeva (1982) argues that language (discourse) has two aspects: the symbolic and the semiotic. In examinations of ‘self’, for instance, the symbolic nature of language maintains the illusion of the self as fixed and cohesive. By contrast, the semiotic aspect of language is a disruptive and oppositional force:

The semiotic throws into confusion all tight divisions between masculine and feminine . . . and offers to deconstruct all the scrupulous binary oppositions—proper/improper, norm/deviation, sane/mad, mine/yours, authority/obedience – by which societies such as ours survive. (Eagleton, 1996, p. 164)

So, while common writing approaches inspiring disclosure in self-narrativity includes various genres, for instance, reflective writing, personal biography, journal/dairy writing, confessional writing, among other styles, whatever style is used must be flexible enough to accommodate the symbolic and the semiotic difficulties in expressing the ‘self’ in *self-narrative*. Instructional sessions engaged students in self-reflexivity, where writing experimented with the generic rules behind various genres of writing (poem, story, allegory, fairytale, etc.). Students used creative writing to question the “grand narratives” of their past (in the Lyotardian sense); that is, the stories individuals tell about their past, their practices and their beliefs about who they were, and who they are (see Lyotard, 1984).

As the creative writing techniques included here emerged as a result of teaching a course on identity and culture to first-year intending secondary teachers, the objectives of the course with respect to creative writing were specific. First, most of the students had never experienced a tertiary setting before, and no student had indicated previous experience in experimenting with any of the creative writing techniques encountered in the course. Indeed, many enrolled students in the course complained about “not knowing how to write” and “not knowing what to write about” from as early as the second week of the semester. The more vocal of that number expressed a genuine anxiety about their lack of writing skill, and spoke freely about “not liking to write”, “not being able to write” and generally lacking confidence to write creatively. These kinds of disclosures motivated developing and implementing a sequence of creative writing skills sessions dedicated to addressing this anxiety based on

unmet needs. In fact, this sense of uncertainty proved important to the concept of “creative writing as freedom, education as exploration” precisely because, “The point about creative writing is that it is impelled by a state of *un-knowing*. It is the anxiety of ‘not understanding’ that drives creativity – a state of conflict generated by the un-known promotes creative thought” (Freiman, 2007, p. 10).

Creative Writing as Critical Action and Reaction

To encourage students to express their sense of identity through writing, their classroom learning experiences necessarily adopted a range of approaches to genre and narrativity incorporating both written and visual modes. Additionally, the very limitations of student experience generally and their restricted exposure to creative writing in particular, necessitated extensive revision activities outlining various creative fiction genres (story, prose-poetry, fairytale, allegory, fable, etc), as well as revision activities over-viewing selected nonfiction genres (report, exposition, biography, interview, etc). Learning experiences also included writing sessions geared toward specific forms of poetry—cinquain, haiku, tanka—as well as ‘free-play’ with creative writing forms—such as narrative play, which combined two written pieces of different genres into a new, hybrid, form—to encourage students’ intuitive responses to writing with writing.

Students shared their written efforts in an open and safe tutorial environment, ‘colloquiums’, and reflected weekly on their creative writing skills development by completing a creative writing journal and also responding to a set of questions. These were supplementary discourses in tandem with their creative writing work that critically reflect on individual works (Sheppard, 2012, p. 111) as well as skills development. These questions were scheduled in the second last week of the semester:

1. What are the major ways your writing has changed in the twelve-week period?
2. Would you suggest these changes have been for the better, or worse?
3. How has listening to the writing of other students (in colloquiums) influenced your own writing? How can you ensure that you use these examples to develop your own techniques, rather than simply using them as a template?
4. Can you link developments in your own writing to personal changes in attitude?

Once upon a time, I would not have thought to mix genres in order to affect the way a piece of writing was written or read. Also, by considering memory and looking analytically or deconstructively I can see points that normally would have been overlooked. In all cases, I think these changes are for the better. For example, I really tend to think about my audience before writing now. I also think my writing has a more professional ‘feel’. Definitely, I think it shows that if given the opportunity you can develop your writing to be a powerful tool in getting a message across. If I take on board these examples then I can use them to help change the way I write and influence or get my point across to my audience better. I can easily link my developments in writing both to how I have learnt new techniques and the fact that my confidence has grown with academic work, and my university experience. (J. W., a 27 year old Australian male)

All writing activities had as their primary objective developing competencies in creating a particular kind of narrative text about the self: autoethnography. As “an

autobiographical genre of writing and research” autoethnography “displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). The unit’s major assessment item required that students prepare an autoethnographic project which accounted for 40% of their total grade for the subject. The stylistic choices regarding the creative writing techniques used here aimed to make possible exploring a multiplicity of “voices and viewpoints” in the interests of enhancing personal growth, nurturing professionalism, and encouraging critical self-reflection:

I feel that my writing has become more creative through experimentation with different genres of writing. This creativity has allowed me to be far more descriptive in my recall of details. When approaching these writing pieces now, I am far more critical of my memories and experiences, and how they link with my perceived identity. I look for ways in providing that link in my writing, between the two. These changes have definitely been for the better.
(Y. M., a 31 year old Australian female)

Writing the Self

This fractured and dissonant interpretation of subjectivity and identity seemed to me to resonate with the somewhat shifting notions of the self that defines much postmodernist logic. While Wiley (2012) argues that this concept of the self “now looks faddish and out-dated” (p. 328), I would like to consider the idea of the post-modern self pragmatically, that is, offer readings of the students’ constructs of ‘self’ as essentially meaningful in that their efforts had practical consequences. The self-narrative works of some students do verify that these creative-writers experienced a sense of identity as apparently disconnected and discordant, and further, as a kind of duality of self; what McAdams and McLean (2013) terms the “narrative identity”, which, on the one hand “is a person’s internalized and evolving life story”, while on the other implicates a process in which that identity integrates “the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (p. 233).

Consider this idea in light of the following example of ‘narrative-play’, by a 19 year old female of Jewish descent. She first created a cinquain using for inspiration a particular experience, abstraction, memory, or concept, etc. The student then progressed the piece, the cinquain, toward an alternative perspective of the same event, this time adopting a different ‘voice’, genre, and subjective position in narrating the experience, thus creating a second, hybrid, form of creative writing:

First piece:

Cinquain

Holocaust
Fearfully Slowly
Marching Crying Waiting
Ignoring the hunger pains
Genocide

Second piece:

“Narrative-Play” poem

Walk through the cold, it is raining
Enter the museum and pay the fee
Walk through the exhibits with the tourists
Read the names on the list

Find great-grandparents, neighbours, friends
Siblings, cousins, teachers
Sad faces, empty stomachs, tear-stained cheeks
Silence
Camps full of children, no toys
Old people, no chairs
Grey-striped pyjamas with caps to match
No grass on the ground
Leave the exhibit, collect coat
Walk through the rain, I shiver.

The first creative writing piece, the five-lined cinquain, follows an iteration of the prescriptions of genre as a poetic form:

1. single noun as subject in the first line (three syllables);
2. two adjectival terms for the subject (five syllables);
3. three verbs relating to subject (six syllables);
4. four words relating to subject (verb+noun+noun; seven syllables)
5. a single synonym for the subject (three syllables).

We seem to “encounter the voice of the writer, because the implied subjectivity of the words reflects ever backwards to the authorial source” (Monelle, 2000, p. 169). This stylistic feature elevates the implied subjectivity of the text toward a structural element. The cinquain is thematically coherent and between the two powerful signifiers opening and closing the piece (Holocaust/Genocide), the reader is taken on a journey of sorts characterized by a progression using a combination of 11 nouns, verbs, and adjectives, toward a discomfiting conclusion.

The second hybrid piece, however, takes the concept of the poetic identity even further. Here, “poetic identity as an aspect of the poetic text is manifest through the linguistic choices, literary devices as well as autobiographical content and all these components need to be part of the analysis of the poetic identity” (Hanauer, 2010, p. 61). What is particularly interesting about this piece as an exercise of storying subjectivity is both the position the author adopts in the construction of self, and the authorial choices made in the representation of Jewish identity. The proximity of the narrator is difficult to accurately determine in the opening and main body of the work. It is only until the very last line that a first-person dialectic is revealed; “Walk through the rain, I shiver”. This suspension of subjective location perhaps attempts, on the one hand, to “name and analyze what is intuitively felt and expressed in the narrative” (Alexander 2014, p. 199), while on the other, acts as a disassociating technique in which the proximity of the reader to the historical backdrop of the narrator’s account is necessarily and temporally detached. Yet more importantly, the authorial position of the narrator is doubly disassociated: from an historical moment (WWII Nazi Germany) and from a religious community experience (the Holocaust). Here, the transformative potential of the poem grapples with transforming a sense of (religious) identity, but in so doing, demonstrates that the construction of a ‘private self’ is simultaneously of public interest—in this case as, tellingly, a museum exhibit—and therefore not mutually exclusive to the private domain.

The purpose of the activities in self-narrative used here was to engage the students with the discursive contradictions between “me” and “I”; which both construct and deconstruct personal subjectivity, that is, the relationships between self-expression and “the subject”, as well as categorize and identify human relationships. It is important to recognize that ‘story’ is not used interchangeably with ‘narrative’ in this discussion of students’ creative writing. While literary theorists state that “A **narrative** is a story” (Abrams &

Harpham, 2012, p. 233), writers such as E. M. Forster defined story as “a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence” (1927), and cognitive theorists argue that the “distinction between story and discourse, or *fabula* and *sjuzet* [plot of a narrative], commonly rests upon the view of story as event-sequence, despite the fact that there is nothing storylike about events in themselves” (Walsh, 2010, p. 153). Clandinin and Connelly (1991) on the other hand state that, “When referring to participant situations . . . we tend to use *story* to refer to particular situations and *narrative* to refer to longer-term life events” (as cited in Schön, 1991, pp. 278-9).

The perspective of this examination is that “narrative” best describes the confessional qualities of the events and situations education students remembered and wrote about. The creative writing samples evidence what linguist William Labov (1972) identified as a “*narrative of personal experience*, in which the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his [or her] past” (p. 354) (as cited in Herman, 1999, p. 233). What follows is an example of a student’s work illustrating how creative writing within autoethnographic methodology can become a catalyst to transform the written text into a tangible object, thus taking the representation of the ‘self’ to yet another dimension as visual art.



Figure 1: Example of a student’s final project at the conclusion of sequential learning in which creative writing as literary and visual arts pedagogy was implemented within the context of autoethnography.

This student, a mature-aged Australian female in her late 30s, chose texts thematically related to the beach for her autoethnographic assignment. In creating her installation, she chose photography and digital imagery transfer as her Arts-based narrative choices. Via these techniques, the student used both existing and newly taken photographic images of herself

and her family and printed these on two tangible objects: a large blue-printed terry-toweling beach towel as well as on a plain white t-shirt. The tape recorder contained a cassette she had assembled of her favorite songs as a young woman, and the inclusion of the cassette-player itself retained currency as symbolic of a technological as well as personal/historical past. The student also included a written piece of creative writing which incorporated both prose and verse. The ‘Reef’ coconut oil added an olfactory dimension to the work which the student felt was especially important; a view shared by scholars in the field (Borthwick, 2006; Coronado, 2011; Mingé & Zimmerman, 2013). The aroma of the oil not only induced particular memories, but located those memories within specific temporal and sensory realms. The installation as both a literary and visual arts work is fundamentally intertextual and highlights the fluidity of constructions of self.

Tellingly, the photograph of the student as a young girl, given in the left of the image, is entitled “Me *or* I [my italics]”, which both plays with the notion of “shifters” as necessarily deictic while somehow attempting to affix meaning to a memorialized, and therefore apparently ‘truthful’, concept of self. The “or” between these two Lacanian shifters (“me” and “I”) appears on the one hand to imply mutability, a kind of one-in-the-same-ness, while on the other also implying mutuality, a sense of affinity between two quite obscure concepts of self. The student grapples with the tensions between the symbolic and the semiotic aspects of language. The symbolic nature of language maintains the illusion of the “me” as fixed and cohesive, but the “... or I” contrasts the semiotic aspect of language is a disruptive and oppositional force. Thus, the piece reflects a characteristically postmodern aesthetic while showcasing a deliberate yet intuitive approach to autoethnography as a methodology in which modes of creative fiction and non-fiction can be applied.

In the case of both student examples discussed, here, the “autoethnographic writer as researcher is presented as someone who uncovers the authentic nature of his or her personal experience and foregrounds the context in which the experience has taken place” (Gilbourne and Llewellyn, 2011, p. 84). Further, the creative artifact provides an example of how creative writing might function within autoethnography as a method of research as a means of better understanding “the self in the lived experience” while merging quite mundane objects—a towel, a beach bag, a t-shirt, a tape-recorder—that quite literally objectifies the encounter by deploying objects as triggers—sensory, emotional, embodied, self-reflective—within a story of “the researcher’s lived experience” (Raab, 2013, p. 2). Stockton (2014) argues that this process of objectification in creative writing, specifically if the self and self-motivation is objectified, is influential as a way of assisting creativity.

Conclusion

While autoethnographic forms are largely *intertextual*, that is, the form generally materializes as a text, modification of this genre of writing was necessary to exploit the intertextuality of the form in its truest sense. Extending the notion of textuality within autoethnography by incorporating creative writing aimed to develop a tangible creative material object which conceivably addresses some critical concerns about the integrity of the methodology (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Boylorn & Orbe, 2012; Struthers, 2014) toward what Crawley (2014) argues “contributes to our emancipation from the creative limitations of validity, reliability, and generalization ... freeing us to examine cultural phenomena for a perspective rooted in our own lived experience and allows us to claim the ‘scientific-ness’ of our innate inner-lives” (p. 222).

Creative writing within autoethnography brings to the fore the question of imaginative agency. The creative writer is free to position how and from what point of view

stories are told and how and from what point of view subjectivities are narrated. “With the act of positioning the teller constructs the degree of autonomy and the level of agency for the protagonist in his[/her] self-narrative” (Kraus, 2013, p. 72). By extension, the integration of creative writing into an autoethnographic methodology opens up the possibilities of continuity and discontinuity of one’s memory of lived experience and the nature of identity. In fact, using creative writing to examine the self within the method of autoethnography makes possible various forms of narrative agency. “It is because we can feel disconnected from our emotional commitments, alienated from the actions of our past selves, unable to project ourselves into the future” claims Mackenzie (2008), “that the integration of selfhood across time is fragile, an achievement of agency rather than a given of experience” (p. 14).

Autoethnography as a practice of writing, self-reflection and memory, stresses the fact that the process of “knowing who I am” is not the same as “remembering who I was”. Memory, therefore, both mediates and defines the student writer/artist as a construction of the past. Autoethnography encourages students to adopt a position in time when the self was knowable and therefore can be expressed through language. Yet, this retrospective looking back problematizes the conception of language as a stable process of utterance, thus in effect, exposing one of the limits of this methodology, at least from a Lacanian perspective. Here the writer influences the narrative point-of-view by intentionally self-positioning the perspective from which the story of self is told as much as the agency and participation of the subject as protagonist within the narrative. “One has to bear in mind that positioning is a process and that its quality is mainly determined by individual capabilities, cultural stereotypes, and situative specifics” (Kraus, 2013, p. 72).

Opportunities to explore the multiple contradictions and complexities of identity can motivate students to generate vividly informative texts. “The intersection of linguistic, artistic, tactile, and visual elements” utilized within this approach “creates what arts-based researchers call a hybrid method, as well as a hybrid ontological position” (Mingé & Zimmerman, 2013, p. 11). Literary and creative hybridity thus creates dynamic teaching and learning realms within which students can self-reflect, self-narrate, and self-create using various forms of literary and visual expression, and I would argue that more research needs to be undertaken to explore the synergistic possibilities of an interdisciplinary approach to creative writing within and beyond autoethnography. This kind of work would contribute to extending the scholarship on ‘creative writing as freedom, education as exploration’ in developing pedagogic approaches to writing, reading, constructing and deconstructing the postmodern self in the first year teacher-education experience.

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