

The Transformative Possibility of Literary Métissage: An action research report

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Abstract

This report describes and exemplifies ongoing action research advancing an inquiry method with the potential to reveal evidence of individual and collective relational learning resulting from teacher professional development. The method of literary métissage encourages the emergence and merging of voices, and may be appropriate for use in contexts other than schools. The report traces the design, enactment and outcome of a workshop presented at the ALARA World Congress, 2018, in which participants concerned with transformative social change experienced the method's potential. Participants' products, involvement in the validation of the project, and authors' reflections on modelling the method are shared.

Key words: action research, literary métissage, relational learning

The Narrative Inquiry Group, of which the authors are members, is a writing collective working in Québec, Canada, representing various education sectors, cultural contexts, and worldviews. Individually, we face challenges offered by political, social, technological shifts. Our classrooms interlace language, ethnicity, culture, ability, need, talent, gender, and orientation. We strive to honor as distinct and yet integrated, the various cultural and geographical contexts within which we work. We have worked in various contexts including elementary, secondary and post-secondary settings, First Nations schools, the Canadian Far North,

Africa, and South America where English and/or français Québécois is the language of instruction. Each of us strives to respect the history, identity and values of other, while navigating a way forward using light-writing, life-writing and literary métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chamber & Leggo, 2009) as "... a practical tool or strategy ... a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages" (pp. 8-9), while remaining conscious of the need for systemic change. In our Canadian culture the word métissage is understood to be a derivative of Métis sash, a multicolored, finger-woven belt attributed to a mixed ancestry culture. As an arts-based inquiry praxis, métissage is a weaving of voices " ... mak(ing) dialogue possible while the dialogue makes possible the rapprochement among disparate, unequal individuals and groups ... lead(ing) to understanding about the self and other and general insight about the world and our place in it" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo, 2009, p. 38).

We take Pauline Samashima's words to heart when she writes

"(o)ur personal experiences move to collective knowledge in the action of sharing. What is basic to education then, is learning how to live well in the world. It is learning how to make meaning and to materialize the hope for something better" (Sameshima, 2018, p. 5).

When we first began to write together, we shared stories of practice, found comfort and some determination in our conversations. Soon, however, we felt we needed to move beyond storying and began look for ways to understand our relational learning. We set out to address the problem of how to sustain and move conversations forward within our own and other communities. We positioned ourselves as narrative inquirers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and began experimenting with light-writing, life-writing and literary métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) as methods that might help us accomplish our goal.

Our inquiries are situated under the arc of action research (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001), conversation (Glenn, Roche, McDonagh, &

Sullivan, 2017), arts-based inquiry (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009), living theory research (Whitehead, & McNiff, 2006), and adult learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). In our professional conversations, values (Whitehead, 2018), and consensus (Horn-Miller, 2013) are central. We gather to learn, spending long afternoons in conversation, coming to a point where talk creates a shift from out to within, and we write. Finally, we create a braid or métissage of distinct but shared voices revealing a new perspective and evidence of our relational learning (The Narrative Inquiry Group, 2018). In this paper, we provide an overview of the ideas and context that frame our research, followed by an enactment of the process from a workshop presented at The Action Learning Action Research (ALARA) Association's World Congress 2018, as we address the question, "How might the practice of literary métissage contribute to, and provide evidence of, learning in relation?"

Our Inquiry Context: A métissage of related perspectives

We draw on an eclectic collection of qualitative outlooks and concerns including voice, consensus and the validity of our work; arts-based inquiry, living educational theory, and learning in adulthood. Our choices are based on practical purposes which disallow "the dominance of theory over practice and policy makers over practitioners" (Portelli & Oladi, 2018, p. 5). We are concerned with teaching and learning, teachers and learners as human, rather than economic endeavors. We value teacher autonomy, self-efficacy, relational trust, and professional development (Clarke, 2019). These perspectives provide us with the tools to demonstrate that we are living our values in our inquiry.

Voice, Consensus and Validation

We learn in conversation (Glenn, Roche, McDonagh, & Sullivan, 2017), and we have learned that together we can create – rather than merely consume – knowledge. Our Narrative Inquiry Group is not a fixed entity. Rather it is a state of interrelatedness

(Sameshima, 2018). The size, shape and color shifts serendipitously, varying with voice, need, mood and time. Our power is located in safety, creativity, determination and love. We are conscious of polyvocality (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015) in speaking, listening, hearing, and interpreting experience (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, & Sinner, 2012; Pletz, 2012). However, we acknowledge that not all voices are equal, that there are inaudible experiences that may or may not be called forth. We are learning of the need for patience, and sometimes, silence, but we are committed to the "... mission to surface the unheard voice" (Jean Hartmann, personal communication, June 19, 2018).

As settlers in North America, we have been schooled on the principle of democratic majority dominance. However, within our narrative writing community we embrace the principle of consensus and equality in relationship (Glenn, Roche, McDonagh, & Sullivan, 2017). John Ralston Saul (2009) writes that as Canadians, "We are a Métis civilization" (p. 3), living in a culture of indigenous ways and immigrant influence. As teacher researchers, we embrace the Aboriginal idea of expandable and inclusive circles of people (Saul, 2009). We align our practice with Haudenosaunee First Nation procedures drawn from the natural world (Horn-Miller, 2013), whereby decision making " ... relies on calm deliberation, respect for diverse views, and substantial agreement" (p. 115), where the "... objectives are engagement, respect and peaceful resolution" (p. 115). It has taken our group many years to arrive at the point where we can say that we work on this principle. Differentials in relationship have diminished, yet we understand that at various points in a project, one member or another may take the lead while denying neither member access to consensus decision making, nor the voice of a minority point-of view.

Validation of our work gives us an indication of our influence as inquirers. Two criteria for judging the validity of arts-based inquiry are offered by Barone and Eisner (2012): structural corroboration, asking if there is evidence in the study that allows for a credible conclusion; and referential adequacy, asking whether

or not the story rings true. Using consensual validation, " ... agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an educational situation are right" (Eisner, 1998, p. 112), we interrogate our work through conference and workshop participants' feedback using the criteria of coherence, consensus and instrumental utility (Eisner, 1998).

Arts-Based Inquiry

We have found our individual and shared voices through the practice of light-writing, life-writing and literary métissage, while inquiring into " ... our relationships with/in the world ... mixing oral renditions of text – autobiographical fragments that arise from our own lived experiences" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Oberg, & Leggo, 2008, p. 57). Lionnet (1989) describes métissage as "a textual weaving of traditions ... linking issues of race, politics, reading and writing" ... revealing ambiguous spaces of possibility, and delving into the interface of the personal and political (Zuss, 1995). "Métissage as a complex and iterative process of writing, braiding, re-writing critical dialogue, reflection, and tension, (brings) differences to the forefront and create(s) an opportunity to challenge the myths of our assumptions and follow new interpretations" (Cox, Dougherty, Lang Hampton, Neigel, & Nickel, 2017 p. 48). Prompts from the day-to-day of our lives, represent individual voices in reflection, and our unified voice in braids of words where snippets of individual reflections are rewritten into a single piece.

In order to bring our ideas to others in other contexts, we spark conversations at conferences or workshops using light-writing where participants study and reflect upon photographs from the authors' personal archives for the purpose of photo elicitation (Harper, 1998), life-writing and métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009; Sinner and Lowther, 2012). Each participant brings a personal perspective to the conversation, reflection, and braid. Following the steps below:

1. Groups are formed with a facilitator to lead the discussion of a pre-selected collection of photo prompts (10) based on a common theme, for example transformative social change.
2. Participants discuss the photos with a question in mind, for example, Where does the image take you in your thinking of transformative social change?
3. Each participant selects an image that draws their attention, takes time to ponder, then records a reflection that may take the form of a list, doodle, poem, rant.
4. Upon completion of individual texts, each group member shares their work aloud.
5. Group members take note of lines from other pieces that particularly resonate with them and with the theme. As well, participants may nominate lines from their own piece.
6. A note-taker is nominated to record all lines selected.
7. Participants consider the organization of the lines, taking into consideration meaning, flow, representational voice, and theme, continuing the process until consensus has been reached.
8. In the case of a single group, the process ends at this point.
9. In the case of multiple groups, one member of each group is nominated to present the braid to the entire gathering.
10. As the métissages are read, contributions to a meta-métissage are identified by all participants. Steps 6 and 7 are repeated.
11. Participants reflect upon and discuss their learning.
12. Subsequently, facilitators provide copies of the meta-métissage to all participants.

Relational Learning: Living theory and perspective transformation

Within our Narrative Inquiry Group, our learning is caring, respectful, and relational (Kitchen, 2009), and each member's needs, working and personal circumstances and experience are valued. Relational knowing values collaboration which contributes to renewal and significant professional development. While we "grow in relationship" (Kitchen, 2009, p. 56), we are guided by our values in our work, asking:

1. What do I care about in education?
2. How do I live my values in my practice?
3. How can I/we improve what we are doing as teachers, researchers and learners?
4. What do I/we do when encountering a contradiction to claimed values in my/our work?
5. What evidence can we offer that this is the case?

(Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

Individually, we make explicit and public value claims (The Narrative Inquiry Group, 2018), which become the markers by which our assertion to engage in valid inquiry may be judged. We understand that we are learning, and that our learning is experiential, purposeful, (Parks Daloz, 2000), and transformative (Mezirow, 2000). We question and revise interpretations of experience, and seek dependable frames of reference (Parks Daloz, 2000) in order to direct our future actions. "Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference ... to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). These may occur through objective reframing, a "critical reflection on the assumptions of others ... as in action learning" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23), or subjective reframing involving "critical self-reflection about one's own assumptions about ... a narrative - applying a reflective insight from someone else's narrative to one's own experience" (Mezirow,

2000, p. 23). As we learn, we change our ways of thinking, being, and knowing in the world (Parks Daloz, 2000), passing through phases of meaning making (Mezirow, 2000):

1. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma, for example encountering a contradiction to one's expressed values
2. Examining one's Self, critically assessing one's assumptions, and deciding to act to resolve the dilemma, and eliminate the contradiction
3. Recognizing that discontent and transformation are shared, and exploring alternative actions, role and relationships
4. Planning and implementing action, and trying new roles
5. Building competence and confidence in a new role
6. Integrating a new perspective into one's life, and making the transformation public

(Adapted from Mezirow, 2000 and Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

Métissage is "a writing and weaving of plural often contradictory aspects of identity and subjectivity, offer(ing) a critical intervention through which narratives of identity may be composed and revised" (Zuss, 1995, p. 27). Our personal and collective transformations are documented in our conversations, written reflections, métissages, presentations and publications.

Our Purpose

Looking at educational influences in Québec today, we see the relationship of knowledge and power in our context as an opportunity for inquiry (Portelli & Oladi, 2018). While recognizing the dominant valuing of efficiency, accountability and standardization at present, we value the idea of teachers as creators of knowledge and believe this may be compatible with existing top-down approaches to professional development.

Self-directed professional development moves us to action leading to knowledge creation. Knowledge then drives action. The emergence of the teacher-researcher's living theory through research on practice offers an opportunity for action and therefore knowing and re-knowing the world of school for the good of all concerned. New perspectives evolve with the potential to influence a meaningful transformation of a system from depersonalized, undemocratic structures to a vibrant, collaborative, living endeavor grounded in individual and collective values and professional development supporting the betterment of schools – schools valued for integrity and professionalism, an alternative to the standardized, marketed institutions of the present.

Looking at our Narrative Inquiry Group, we acknowledge that our thinking may be seen to be naïve, however, we remain committed to living our values of caring about teaching and learning, teachers and learners in a practice while embracing action research. Our self-directed professional development counterbalances top-down directives. Action and reflection link the teaching experience to sense-making and learning, and with *métissage*, we have experienced the emergence of a collective consciousness, a means to our unanimous desired end – teacher learning for improved practice. We were invited into literary *métissage* in seminars at the Center for Oral History and Digital Story Telling at Concordia University (COHDS) Montréal. We set out to refine a context-specific method and our question became: *How might we use life-writing, light-writing, and literary métissage as a site for relational learning, and to provide evidence of that learning?*

Generating and Braiding Stories

Our purpose in proposing a workshop at ALARA 2018 was to explain and provide an example of an evolving inquiry method, and to gather feedback from participants as to the worth of our inquiry. We offered an opportunity to explore the possibility of professional learning with a view to transformative social change using literary *métissage* by engaging participants in the practice. Laurie's reflection describes the enactment of the process.

Laurie's Reflection

There were six participants in my group. They were all talkative, but quickly got down to the first task, choosing a picture that they could relate to. The group was ready to write, and after the brief discussion about their choice of photo, they were ready to find a quiet place to work. Ten minutes later we gathered together to share our stories. Andy volunteered to read first. Eli volunteered to scribe, and I reminded the group to also jot down the words or phrases that were powerful and interesting to them. All of the stories were shared, and a few ideas were put forth to find the theme for the braid. Considering the snippets from the stories and the two emergent moods – light and dark – the group reached consensus and chose to go with the theme from despair to hope. The final piece reflected the theme of transformation and the message of hope. (Laurie MacLeod, personal communication, June, 2018).

Light-Writing and Life-Writing

Participants formed three groups, and after a brief introduction to our inquiry and method, a guiding question was offered: *Where does the image take you in your thinking about transformative social change?* The process is demonstrated below in verbatim data from



Figure 1. Andy's light/life-writing.

the light/life writing activity with images and reflections of individual members of Laurie's group, followed by the braided

métissage. Pseudonyms are used and the reflections and braid were volunteered by participants.

This brings bitterness to my mind. This barbed-wire brings anger; it borders on hatred, these feelings. I direct my anger at those in my culture who have no other desire but to hurt those considered less than human, to cause trauma to children of those same people. This conjures images of brown people being forcibly disposed by a nation that falsely prides itself on vaunted freedom and democracy, but only for those with the money, the power, the status, and even the education. Is this where we are? Will we stop this slip into the darkness, or will we just let it happen all over again? I am supposed to have something good to say about those elements of imprisonment. Imprisoned in a body, imprisoned on a planet, imprisoned in an ethic of social class, imprisoned in an economic class – what difference does it make? How do we stop talking about this, and march against this horrific treatment of others? Not enough have cared in the decades before. How do we stop paying lip service to the likes of democracy, justice, peace, and philanthropy, instead of just actively blowing back against the hatred, anger, disdain, and social injustice? This prison image has shown itself for what it is. It is our job to define ourselves by the opposite of this image, or all will be lost, and it will be by our own hands. Hope is useless when you've been robbed of your voice.



Figure 2. Blair's light/life-writing.

So, now, we know what it is, we must take back from thieves, liars, connivers, and hate-mongers amongst us. We must take back our hope.

I've been thinking about system worlds and life worlds. This image speaks to me of that: the system world has efficiently produced and packaged the shrimp, it looks like it is for a market in Japan. The shellfish are fresh: packaged at sea, going to be put on ice. Look at the expression on the fisherman's face. His eyes are sad, his lips are compressed. To me, (I'm projecting) part of him is dying as he captures and boxes those creatures. He is expressing something in his face - something that might be set free. Then - look at the reproduced image of the shrimp itself, its eyes, its pinkness, its legs and tentacles frozen into an archetypical picture. What is that creature, boxed and thing-ified, saying to us, to me? It's speaking silently of death, or the ecological damage of human appetite, or the removal of a creature from context, so as to render it meaningless and devoid of life. So, this image is of something concrete, common, normal, our expression of trade success, yet this situation is so tenuous. Its pain could be realized in an instant. I, the consumer, could say no. The fisherman could act on his feelings. We could not turn away. We could leave the creatures in the ocean and find other things to eat. The life world could emerge. And, he's wearing, Hele Hanson extreme weather gear. We humans are so clever! It could make me hate myself as I sip my Pepsico-apple juice out of a plastic bottle. We don't see - I don't see - the consequences.



Figure 3. Charlie's light/life-writing.

This image takes me forward in my thinking about transformative social change ... in this picture I see the signs of industrial progress. The big tractors ready to dig up the earth and build new things in order to make us humans wealthy and add more convenience. On the other hand, I see the earth and our natural surroundings barren, broken, dry, dead. But I see hope – hope in the blue, blue sky. This to me is a metaphor for what is happening in our world. The struggle between business as usual in terms of western values and those who are struggling within that system, including the more than human, and those who are beginning to fight for the voiceless, the powerless – the hope for a better future. We are at a turning point, I believe. This is a time of turmoil as the powerless gain their voice and start to fight back against the powerful. Just as in the picture where we see the results of progress – the discarding of items no longer required – thrown away? Left behind. We see the same in every community, those left behind, discarded. But now, as never before, there are a growing number of people willing to take up the voice of the voiceless – through telling of their stories, so that it is no longer possible to ignore what was once not seen. This sheds light on a problem, like the sun on a seed, helping the seed to flourish.



Figure 4. Dale's light/life-writing.

This photo takes me back to childhood. I haven't thought much about childhood for a long while ... I see in this the quietude of life that I grew up in. The unsophisticated world in which lives were simple, no great demands, just the signs of daily living. It brings to

me a sense of isolation, one that ever surrounds me. I always felt alone, even when in the company of others. Raised by a single mom, struggle became a way of life. There were no dolls, or pretty dresses – I dressed myself in hand-me downs for a decade at least. It's taught me to be frugal. Bargains are an essential part of my life now – so then are they just seeping into my living? I knew of the haves and have nots! I grew up without much, I didn't need much and I've come from making my own living, into this world of abundance in having modern comforts and multiple choices. Here we are, still confronted by torments of racial/social/individual inequity. Distress of emotional traumas, and separation of human connections. I yearn for the solitude of simple living, uncomplicated, knowing, and special.



Figure 5. Eli's light/life-writing.

I like the engagement of the younger children which signifies to me that the readings are interesting to them. On the other hand, it is the older child/person (both male) who are reading so their voices are heard. This suggests a hierarchy. I value the voices of each individual and especially the voices of children and the oppressed. I would like to see younger children reading aloud to the older ones. When individuals speak with their own voices, they learn independence of thought and inquiry. In the grouping of the older boy and younger girls, there seems to be a stronger relationship as indicated by the proximity of the girl on the right. The girl on the left and the younger boy on the right, there is more

distance to the older person (although the boy seems to be straining to connect and see more clearly). Peer learning has been proven by research to be very effective in improving learning. Peer learning is often undervalued and under-utilized when adults need control. Responsive teaching improves with students taking responsibility for their learning and asking their own action research questions such as *How can I accept criticism without feeling I am a bad person?*



Figure 6. Laurie's light/life-writing.

I am one in a community,
Young and nearly new,
Safe in the arms that hold me
My journey begins.
The cycle is my choice.
When I chose this place
I chose this family.
Each member has their own story.
These stories will carry me,
And guide my journey,
As I build my own stories.
I know their love will sustain me,

As I learn who I am,
And who I will become.

From Despair to Hope - A Literary Métissage

Distress of emotional trauma,
Uncomplicated knowing and speaking,
The powerless strain their voices,
Bare and broken,
Dry and Dead.
Safe in the arms that hold me,
My journey begins.
Thieves, liars, connivers
and hate-mongers among us
Asking their questions.
Eyes are sad,
Lips are compressed,
Part of him is dying,
Something that might be set free.
An expression so tenuous,
Like sun on a seed,
We could turn away, or
Take back our hope.

Discussion

We evaluate our research by making it public at conferences and inviting input from participants. We seek corroboration in participants' voices of our view that our work is credible and useful. The resulting discourse guides us as we learn, adapt and

move forward. We learn from dialogue as we assess acts, feelings, (Mezirow, 2003), and values lived or contradicted (Whitehead, 2018)). At ALARA we asked:

1. In what way have you been influenced by this workshop experience?
2. Where does our work take you in your thinking about transformative social change?
3. In what way might the method be useful to you in your context?
4. What suggestions would you offer as we move forward?

We bring the voices of participants into the discussion using verbatim data in quotations.

Responses indicate that the method could be useful to elicit participation, dialogue and collaboration in various groups, thus giving voice and constructing shared meaning and knowledge: "I think your work is a great way to get conversation about transformative social change started. You get people thinking, and talking, and sharing experiences and ideas. It's about working together - sitting together, voicing together, feeling together, processing together. Everyday life can be more impactful when you work together."

Métissage offers the possibility of addressing social issues, bringing lived values to the conversation, questioning perceptions of influences, validating voices, and, perhaps, supporting action: "I am pondering the transformative social change piece. It really makes me think I need to question my assumptions about transformative social change. I can see how the process validates the voices of the people in the room - which is in itself a worthwhile thing. And, maybe if regular/repeated that would support action. Based on the transformative social change, it will definitely lead to a greater future."

The following tables include all comments offered at ALARA 2018.

Table 1 *Responses to: In what way have you been influenced by this workshop experience?*

Participant and Comment

1. Made me think how I could use it to elicit dialogue from youth groups on different issues.
2. Wowed Again! Second time participating in métissage.
3. It demonstrates the importance of listening and working together.
4. It will help me re-design my approach to my “This, I believe” paper, as well as the photographic essay/visual rhetoric paper, all of which my students perform.
5. A very enjoyable workshop. I can imagine using this with groups of doctoral students.
6. I liked integration of visual data and written work. Process created a community. Adds to a pooling of knowledge. Amazing creative process. Very powerful experience especially in responses of individuals and group.
7. I was very moved by one picture. I enjoyed the process and would consider using it as an alternative way of building joint meaning. Learning.
8. This is a valuable tool to use for our students to unpack important social issues and bring their values/interpretations to the floor for discussion.
9. Its participatory nature appealed to me and the nature of the collaboration involved in it. We worked on level playing field where no one feels that their ideas or thoughts are unvalidated.
10. Questioning my perception of the imposed vision/direction of development of people/communities/nations – i.e. Western influence (almost imposition) at the detriment of the local view, opinion and customs.

11. The workshop is a greater experience and nice expectation.
 12. This was a very powerful workshop for me. It became very evident to me that this approach can be a very powerful tool for the voiceless to gain voice in a very positive experience. It is engaging and participatory and it displays the beauty of the multiple voice coming together.
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Table 2 Responses to: Where does our work take you in your thinking about transformative social change?

Participant and Comment

1. I think it is appealing, fun way to generate knowledge, works well with photo voice as well.
2. It's about working together – sitting together, voicing together, feeling together, processing together.
3. I think your work is a great way to get a conversation about transformative social change started. You get people thinking, and talking, and sharing experiences and ideas.
4. How everyday life can be more impactful when you work together.
5. We must get through the worst of our feelings, in order to bring out the best.
6. I am pondering about the transformative social change piece. I can see how the process validates the voices of people in the room – which is in itself a worthwhile thing. And maybe if regular/ repeated that would support action.
7. It really makes me think I need to question my assumptions about transformative social change.
8. I would like to do the same exercise with my students focusing on the concept of transformative social change and how to recreate it.

9. Based on the transformative social change will definitely lead to greater future.
 10. One question I had with this method was the pictures that were presented. How were they chosen? – as the type of images chosen could potentially lead, when the participants can't bring their own pictures.
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Table 3 Responses to: In what way might the method be useful to you in your context? Does the process make sense? If yes, what leads you to accept it? If not, what was your experience?

Participant and Comment

1. I use art-based methods so this is good – particularly methodologies.
2. A way to develop shared understanding, defend without the need to explain of different viewpoints.
3. Personally, I have not done an exercise like this in decades. For my professional life, these exercises are not helpful!
4. Everyday life can be more effective and efficient if you take the time to work together. From marriage to parenting. This is a testament to leading by example.
5. But - it might not support action. And how easy would it be to support action is valuable - precious. But genuine consensus is a difficult thing to achieve. So, thank you for helping me think about this.
6. I experienced it as an intriguing way to generate shared knowledge. Thinking together. I might be more critical about the outcome. What is the desired outcome? Is it the métissage itself? Or maybe change in myself on the world?
7. Well presented with good facilitation of the activity which will enable replication back home.

8. The participatory nature is extremely useful. It does make sense. However, in my context, I would need to recreate it to fit it in my context.
 9. I related the method to the analysis tool that produces a world map from a collection of components, but it has more personal immediate impact. Possible to apply to gain common understanding and agreement in a variety of circumstances (org. Change)
 10. It is a useful context and truly makes sense in order to bring hope and stability.
 11. I see this as very useful in my work and am interested in pursuing this further.
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Table 4 Responses to: What suggestions would you offer to help us move our work forward?

Participant and Comment

1. Come to my community!
2. I think this would be an amazing tool for conflict resolution and peace keeping. Forces people to listen 😊
3. I'm not sure. I think you've made this as simple as you could, without making the task less powerful, or less meaningful. If anything, it helps bring meaning to the lives of those performing this.
4. Create your own living educational theories and make them public. How can I help? Include alternative forms of data. Keep up the good work!
5. I don't really have a suggestion. I do not know it well enough. I'll actually play with it, I will communicate with you.
6. How would you do this from the ground up, not you leading it.

7. Publish!
 8. Get out there and share this experience in many different contexts. I see the value of this working in every place that community gathers.
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Stereo-Typical

Images



Figure 7. Stereotypical image.

We were challenged on questions of bias or stereotyping in our image bank (Figure 7) and of balance of voice in our discussions: "One question I had with this method was the pictures that were presented. How were they chosen? – as the type of images chosen could potentially lead, when the participants can't bring their own pictures." Stereotypical images based on ethnicity and perpetuating biases are two observations that we shall address. Foremost, we need to be aware and clear about our settler perspective to those not present at a workshop. As well, it should be noted that, in our practice, we do not use photo elicitation, however, we find it a useful catalyst in workshops. In order to diminish similar challenges in the future we will be developing a project where we will engage a focus group to assist in refining our image bank to reflect more neutral, perhaps abstract, themes.

The issue of voice and balance of voices within groups also arose: "This was a very powerful workshop for me. It became very

evident to me that this approach can be a very powerful tool for the voiceless to gain voice in a very positive experience. It is engaging and participatory and it displays the beauty of the multiple voice coming together." We are left to consider how to create a conversation space without dominance, and with acknowledgement of, and respect for, the stories and prejudices of others.

The Conjunction of Consensus-Making and Aesthetic Judgement

One reviewer for this submission to *ALARj* invited us to discuss the conjunction of consensus-making and aesthetic judgement. This has been a taken-for-granted part of the process for us, and we find the question intriguing. What happens when we braid? A braid is more than words. We question existing perspectives and find new directions. We open ourselves to possibility and therefore, to compromise. We understand consensus as full agreement (Horn-Miller, 2013), not democratic majority. A braid is an expression of a collective consciousness, of a composite identity, an aesthetic collage. We navigate tensions between Self and Other as we select words and phrases and order them into a comprehensive and meaningful piece (Hasebe-Ludt, et al, 2009), into a product of agreement on aesthetic appeal and ideas grounded in our values. Each participant has ownership of the end result. As we give voice to all participants, we facilitate a transformation within each Self, and when we all agree, we feel the energy of the group supporting and validating new ideas. A video in which the métissage of the authors' reflections after ALARA 2018 is completed, and thoughts on learning in relation are shared is available at <https://youtu.be/insEwsF0Zwc>

Conclusion

The conclusion to this paper takes the form of author reflections on the ALARA 2018 experience and a métissage. We understand that transformative learning is located at the intersection of cognition, affect, memory, and choice. Our group provides a fluctuating, polyvocal, mediating space. ALARA 2018 World Conference was

another such learning site (Zuber-Skerritt, (2017). We are inspired by Carl Leggo who wrote, "... our shared life moments are continually rewriting our understandings of self-in-relation. We become part of our mutual stories and relational characters ..." (Irwin, Hasebe-Ludt & Sinner, 2019, p. 176). After ALARA 2018, we met to debrief, and reflect on the experience and our learning. Following excited chatter and reflective discussion, we settled in to write our Selves, and then, to create a métissage wherein we wrote one another (Irwin, Hasebe-Ludt & Sinner, 2019).

Lynda's Reflection

I'm off to ALARA! It was a first for me – presenting at an international conference, in a space where the participants were not necessarily in the education field. Whether it be in the Philippines, Mali, the U.K., New Zealand or North America, the blood that runs through the veins of those who believe and activate ALARA has a common feature: its basic molecule feeds on the mission to make the world a better place for all. I had an epiphany as I was mentally rehearsing for our workshop, which provided dots to connect.

- Dot 1. We all have our unique constellation of values and a passion for compassion. Some choose to act upon it. These were at ALARA. All had a flame for action learning and action research. All had a flame for learning action and researching action. All had a flame for transformative social change.
- Dot 2. One speaker mentioned that transformation implies a paradigm shift and that it is a function of Power X Love X Inquiry.
- Dot 3. Another asserted that transformation occurs when you are empowered. You have to work for your agency.
- Dot 4. Transformative social change can be at many levels: individual, professional and organizational. Each level can mesh with the others. In fact, an awakening of such an interplay occurred in me as I participated in the session

titled Community-based Education and the Fight for Educational Justices: Uncovering Tension and Possibilities through Living Curriculum, presented by K. Goessling, S. Selvaraj, C. Fritz, and K. Brooks.

- Dot 5. Action research is an ecosystem.
- Dot 6. Quoting Freire, "You can't get there from there. You get there from here."

Connecting the dots. At ALARA, I had a glimpse of the ecosystem. It is vibrant, healthy, caring and prolific. The passion for compassion emanates and radiates everywhere. Now, sitting here in Montréal, a month after having been at the conference, I know viscerally that I have a role to play in this ecosystem. I ponder where my there is and how I will get there from here. The equation for action research and learning action, Power X Love X Inquiry, has contributed to an important shift in my paradigm due to its simplicity in the sense that it offers three critical factors. With this function in my mind, I now have an action plan.

The first stepping stone is to identify my unique constellation of values. With the latter in hand, it will provide a platform to help me identify the cause of some living contradictions with which I am faced as an invited professor who is involved with the next generation of teachers of French as a second language. In turn, I will be able to pinpoint avenues for agency. I believe that with the awareness of my power, the compassion I have for the educational field and my sense of inquiry, I will find my voice and be able to contribute to the ecosystem of transformative social change.

Laurie's Reflection

Upon arrival, it was obvious that the people attending this conference were uniformly positive, outgoing and successful. Conversations were developed around issues of social injustice, prejudice, gender equality, education, in a way that values all voices. This was not a meeting of teachers. Rather, experts in the fields of environmental and health science, nursing, linguistics and education shared their ideas and needs regarding action research. I

was impressed by all of the keynote speakers. I remember particular stories as they opened my mind to things that mattered to me, or in one speaker's words, something shifted in me. A story about literacy and the so-called illiterate villages in Africa will stay with me forever. Another speaker's personal story of her experience of an uninvited sexual advance emphasized that women need to reflect on the how to change their ways of dealing with men who objectify them. The stories and discussions in this atmosphere of safety and openness, have me thinking about the importance of writing life stories that address my acts of living my beliefs. Something in me shifts a little. Living theory – living what I believe to be true. We must be true and allow ourselves to be vulnerable. Power and magic come from knowing the values I want to teach. We love what we do, and love carries energy. What matters? It matters! For clarity, I need light! I am an observer, I want to know more! I am because We are!

Judy's Reflection

I had inklings of how I/we fit in to the action research community. Some were confirmed, others emerged as contradictions on signs along the road.

- Road Sign: I bordering other and elsewhere. Crossing. An invitation to innovation, revelation.
- Road Sign: I/Me/Self. Research led me from isolation to insulation. A special education teacher, kids considered to be outside the norm, me too; doctoral student, faculty wondering why a teacher? why psychology? adjunct professor, outside the circle of tenure. In action research, I find community.
- Road Sign: We/Other. Learning at the conference was alive, thrumming, energizing. Self within Selves, a space for conceptualizing, reflecting, relating, knowing, acting, abstracting. Refine. Repeat. Surge versus stagnation, power versus coercion – let us consider these for a moment, or forever. In the heat of a lazy June afternoon, when the body craves water and a cool breeze, the brain races breakneck.

What-ifs glance off the inside of my skull. What if the borders blur between us and other? Conversation? Community? Voice? Partnership? Are teachers colonized, marginalized in terms of professional development? Is a dialogic rather than diagnostic approach a possibility? Is there energy for this within our system? Isn't a culture of inquiry worthwhile considering as an alternative to burn-out? What might be gained from this? Empowerment? Improved practice? School well-being? What if I had not participated in the ALARA World Congress? What if I do nothing more?

- ➞ Road Sign: Self/Selves. Place, time, and serendipity brought me, Devan, Jean, Laurie and Lynda together. There was a feeling of belonging, believing in the possibility of change, of achievement regardless of the immensity of the challenge, imagining a future as action researchers, belonging, transitioning, transforming. Repeat. Jean articulated what had seemed obscure. "It is our mission to surface the unheard voice" (Jean Hartmann, personal communication, June 18, 2018). Yes! So obvious! We talked excitedly, then reflectively, finally, we wrote and braided our thoughts into a métissage of questions, challenges, admissions and commitment.
- ➞ Road Sign: I/Self/Other/We/Selves. Transition to the intersection of values, community, change.

Métissage – Shifting into Learning in Relation

Transitioning Shift – I came feeling less than

I had inklings

What might we gain in looking beyond I/Self?

What is my responsibility?

Who's judging whom?

Borders blur

Interplay awakens

Place, time and serendipity bring us together

Alive, thrumming, energizing

I am ready to be connected

I am able to let go

There are signs along the way

Transitioning shift – The strength of each voice softens

Opens my mind

Conversations value all voices

Things that mattered to me

Ideas were separate and joined

Blood that runs through the veins of those who
believe

Atmosphere of safety and openness

Atmosphere of unity in diversity

Passion for compassion emanates and radiates

Many and vast influences, mesh with others

Community in a state of transition

We reposition our Selves

Transitioning shift – What if I do nothing more?

I have a role to play in this ecosystem

I have a unique constellation of values

I know viscerally, I have to work for my agency

I choose to act

Surge versus stagnation

Power versus coercion

I/We fit

Crossing, invitation, innovation, revelation

Road sign, I/Self/Other/We/Selves

A basic molecule feeds on the mission to make the
world a better place for all

Yes! It is obvious!

There is a feeling of belonging

Transitioning shift – Isn't a culture of inquiry worthwhile?

Sameshima (2018) reminds us of the importance of “the interpretation of experience (which) determines the trajectory of questioning, hope, love and well-being” (p. 5). This was brought home to us once again at ALARA 2018. We have confidence in our abilities and identities as teacher-researchers as we determinedly braid the personal, practical and theoretical, and imagine a better world. We invite leaders in education in our local context and beyond to be open to the creation of a culture of inquiry in our schools, to the building of relational trust within the system, to the possibility of teachers experimenting in the classroom, where professional development and teaching become one, braided into a métissage of shared values, in the colors of teachers and learners, teaching and learning.

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Biographies

Lynda Giguère

I am presently at l'Université de Québec à Montréal, teaching students at the Bachelor's level who wish to become French-second-language teachers, to either Anglophones or immigrants. I have taught multiple disciplines and levels (K to U), in French and English. A turning point was being involved with the Inuit in Northern Québec. Being immersed in a culture that was new to me

and being part of a visible minority enriched my life. That experience gave me some landmarks, Inukshuk so to speak. It unveiled a tundra that at first seemed very desolate, but fed my professional and personal Self.

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Laurie MacLeod

I have taught all levels of Elementary and High school to children fully immersed in English second language programs. I learned early that I needed to go to the place where they were learning to help my students excel and feel confident. I recently returned from a teaching position in Brazil, where I taught a Canadian High School program in a Brazilian private school. My journey to a unilingual country was an unexpected hurdle that has humbled me. I now, clearly understand the resistance or hesitance of my former students in Quebec, whose first language is Québécois French.

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Lynda Giguère, Judy McBride and Laurie MacLeod

Judy McBride

I retired from secondary special education classroom, and the university classroom as well, having enjoyed two intertwined and privileged positions. Well into my career, I began to research my practice using the lens of my values to define my teacher-research. Because I believe in the possibility of change, I continue to work with teacher-researchers in various contexts at home and abroad in

my retirement. The ALARA Congress experience offered my colleagues, Lynda and Laurie, and me an opportunity to significantly move our work forward – yet another privilege for which we are grateful.

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