

The Graduate School of Education  
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# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**

## A/r/tography and the Literary and Performing Arts

**Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 2013**

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Guest Editors *Rita L. Irwin*  
*Anita Sinner*

Editor  
Associate Editor  
Designer

*Lindy Joubert*  
*Naomi Berman*  
*Rosie Ren*

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## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

*The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.*

*Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.*

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# Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

## Guest Editors

*Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner*

### THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

# Interweaving A/R/Ts and Graphy: Discursive and Seasonal Positions of Writing and Writing Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

*A/r/tographers do not stand passive within their contexts, but rather assemble these experiences to order to shape their work, stories, beliefs and identities. Drawing on critical literacies and discursive positioning theories and using the metaphor of an oak tree, I interweave an autobiographic literary, theatrical, and visual assemblage that anchors traces of memories and influences my daily life as a writer and teacher of writing. This assemblage draws on the a/r/tographic concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess, and suggests the a/r/tographic methodology has the potential to inform writing processes and hold a valid place inside in Arts and Language Arts classrooms as artists/authors (of various ages) assemble their own literacy stories, memories, and experiences.*

## KEYWORDS

*a/r/tography, writing, writing instruction, identities*

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

Kari-Lynn Winters is an award-winning children's author, playwright, elementary school teacher, and academic scholar. She currently holds an assistant professor position at Brock University in the Faculty of Education. Her research interests include: drama in education, children's literature, literacy, and multimodal forms of learning. More information about Kari-Lynn (including a detailed CV) can be found on her website: <http://kariwinters.com>.

*An artist does not stand passive before the experiences, languages, histories, and stories that confront her, but assimilates and does work on these resources in crafting a self and a voice” (Lensmire 1997, p. 77).*

In this article, I assemble traces from my past that anchor my memories and influence my daily life, in order to explore how literary and artful inquiry has the potential to strengthen educators’ teaching practices in Language Arts, helping them to become more cognizant of and think critically about the ways that power is distributed within and beyond educational settings. Creating this assemblage has also helped me make sense of the shifting and multiple professional identities I hold as an assistant professor, a teacher, a dramatist, a visual artist, a researcher, and an author of children’s literature.

Drawing on critical literacy and discursive positioning theories, I interweave an autobiographic assemblage using literary (e.g., spoken word poetry, children’s picture book manuscripts, journals), theatrical (e.g., play scripts, monologues), and visual (ceramics, paper cut-outs, children’s book illustration) forms of representation. Alongside this data, I have added renderings through think-alouds (created during the art-making) and reflection notes (created following the art-making) as ways to highlight my “in-process” thinking and analytic frame. These renderings draw on the a/r/tographic concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess, and suggest the a/r/tographic methodology that helped me negotiate this paper.

I make three inquires. First, how did I become a children’s author and academic scholar who uses the literary, visual, and dramatic arts to engage in, educate with, and investigate the world? Second, how did the discursive positions that I assumed and assigned in the past become a critical part of my journey to becoming a seasoned writer/teacher of writing? And third, how might teachers of language arts strengthen their classroom writing practices by combining artistic forms of meaning-making and writing together and by understanding their own ongoing artful journeys?

## THEORETICAL FRAME

“Writing is power.” Many of us have heard this phrase and witnessed the authority that writing holds. Seasoned writers balance craft and meaning. They understand how to evoke ideas and emotional responses both through technical skills (e.g., character development, genre, rhythm, storyline) and through the content/themes they communicate. Like all of the arts, writing offers opportunities for: voicing and disseminating information, practicing craft, sharing experiences, collaborating with others, debating ideas, and so forth.

Critical literacy researchers like Gee (1996), Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner (1997), Sarangapani (2003), and others who have studied the power that writing holds have argued that power relations are an everyday part of the social worlds that students navigate inside and beyond classroom settings. Moreover, although students hold valuable perspectives about and intuitive cultural insights into what writing can be or mean for students, their voices and actions are often silenced/stilted by those who hold more authority, such as administrators, teachers, and even other students (Lensmire, 1997).

Yet, Dyson (1997; 2003) demonstrates that within social contexts, when children have many opportunities to feel like authors—both through print and multimodally—they are given chances to assume new and more empowered positions within their situated contexts. In other words, through authorship, students have chances to “re-position” themselves and “be positioned” as more authoritative (Davies & Harré, 1996). In this way, expert/novice relationships become more blurred, and educational institutions can become spaces where power can be more equally distributed.

Dyson’s critical and social premise (1997; 2003) can also be extended to theories in the field of education. Similar to writing, which has been privileged in institutions like schools and universities, quantitative methodologies have also been viewed by some researchers to be more rigorous and evidence-based. Yet when researchers have opportunities to explore problems and when they feel authorized to co-create using a range of modalities and in relation to others, they can often go deeper into particular nuances related to the problem at hand. In this way, a/r/t/ography moves away from quantitative methods and deductive reasoning and into the realms of inductive and creative qualitative inquiry. Here researchers are positioned not as outsiders trying to uncover the answers, but rather as active participants or as insiders encountering and experiencing data through practices of engagement. The emphasis here is on the participants’ lived experiences and ongoing inquiry, including their own subjectivity and ways of knowing.

Drawing on scholarship from philosophy, phenomenology, feminist theories, contemporary art criticism, and educational action research, a/r/t/ography emerged and materialized as a methodology from the University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Education (c.f. <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca:16080/Artography>). More specifically, it grew from a graduate seminar series (entitled “A Pied” symposium) which included participants that were both faculty members and graduate students (Pryer in Irwin and de Cosson, 2004, p. 201).

Today, a/r/tography can be seen as a practitioner-based methodology where processes of art-making are ongoing, relational, and scholarly. It includes ways of knowing that are rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess. A/r/tography is an in-process, iterative, and reverberating research methodology that actively interweaves communities of practice and multiple forms of knowing. It is an artful methodology that is about relations, associations between identities and communities. Rita Irwin defines a/r/tography in this way:

*To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work is rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry approach is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/ provocative works to others. (Irwin, 2005, <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca:16080/Artography/index.php>)*

Drawing from the above definition, I use a/r/tography in this article as a methodology to try to capture the flexible and dynamic momentum of my life-long mean-making and to interweave my professional identities.

## METHOD

This a/r/tographic (and ongoing) study began six years ago, when I first heard about this methodology. As a grad student at the time, I began assembling traces of my past and all the while looking closely at the ways I assume and assign power and position myself (Davies & Harré, 1996) within communities of discursive practice through literary and artistic representations of meaning-making. Additionally, over these six years, while compiling the evidence of these meaning-making practices, I began engaging in artistic inquiry (through ceramics, paper cut-outs, and drama) in order to extend the boundaries of this scholarly inquiry and to engage in this investigation in an authentic and embodied way. Many of these art pieces have been featured throughout this article.

Specifically, I found myself employing the metaphor of a tree in order to help me organize this study. Like the tree, I too have weathered seasons, and I am continually growing, re-rooting, and expanding. As well, although the tree is essentially the same (an oak tree is always an oak tree, it never becomes a maple), each tree is unique. This is because (similar to the opening quote) a tree does not stand passive before the experiences that confront it. It assimilates its environment and crafts its own shape — something good writers also do. As I write about the seasons of my literary life, these seasons also write me, making me into the author/artist/teacher/researcher that I am today.

# AUTOBIOGRAPHIC INQUIRY AND A/R/TOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

## SPRING

Spring is a time of growth. In my life, spring represents my childhood and teenage years. It was during these 18 years that I planted the seeds which have taken hold in my life. Below, I have provided a ceramic interpretations of spring in order to identify what this season means to me (see Figure 1).

Figure 1  
A childhood of springs



*For what kind of power could there be in an acorn....What lessons could it teach [her]? (Casler 1994).*

Through an illustrated North American myth, Casler asks about the power of seemingly insignificant items such as an acorn. As I study my own literary and artful life, I ask similar questions, specifically about the position of insignificance.

Figure 2  
What kind of power  
could there be  
in an acorn?



As a child, I did not know how to ‘rise’ to the occasion of writing; I was oblivious to the ways my teachers wanted me to grow and blossom. I did not know how to negotiate what Gee (1989) describes as the larger political entity — the discourse of academia. Because I did not understand the alphabet sound/symbol connection (phonics) during my early school years, some teachers called me illiterate. But was I? I could comprehend and re-tell stories that were read to me, like *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss 1957) and *The Best Nest* (Eastman 1968). I could decipher and draw pictures, act out stories such as *Strange Bumps* (Lobel 1975), and create dances for *The Berenstain’s B Book* (Berenstains 1971). I was writing in many modes, but because I was not using print to convey the message, I was positioned by others as “illiterate.”

#### *What Counts as Writing?*

In the 1970s, authorship presupposed printed alphabetic texts. In recent years, however, scholars have begun defining literacy differently. New Literacy scholars like Gunther Kress (2009), Kate Pahl, and Jennifer Rowsell (2005), and others (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; references withheld) suggest that literacy is broader than language alone. Moreover, their definition of authorship includes music, illustration, photography, mask-making, movement, drama, oral language, and all of the other modes that people use to design, negotiate, produce, and disseminate information (reference withheld). Additionally, Hull and Nelson (2005) state, “there are unmistakable signs that what constitutes reading and writing are changing — indeed, have already changed” (p. 224). As a a/r/tographer I find myself aligning with these broader, more recent views of authorship.

#### *Just an Acorn*

I wasn’t like the other kids in my class. I marvelled at the ways others could translate their thoughts into meaningful squiggles on the page. Though I could think about the stories I had read and could write them with images, gestures, and songs, translating these ideas to a printed text was more difficult. Below (See Figure 3) I offer an example from my grade 3 journal, framed and analyzed through a/r/tographic renderings. (Note that the words attributed to Mrs. McNaughton may not be exactly the words that she used since they come from memories, not actually transcripts.)

## Personal Narrative “Descriptive Writing”

*Mrs. McNaughton hands us our journals. ‘We’ll work on writing a descriptive story today,’ she states. “Write a list of descriptive words.” Immediately, everyone starts writing. I sit — frozen. I try to sneak a peek at the others’ journals, but I can’t read cursive upside down. It seems that a long time passes.*

*“What descriptive words are on your list?”*

*Others read their lists. “Good. Now write your own story. Be sure to include some of the descriptive words that were on your list.”*

*I put my pencil on the paper and try to write the words I remember in cursive. It looks messy. I cross it out. ~~I remember~~*

*Mrs. McNaughton sees me struggling and sits beside me. “You can do this. You’re always acting out descriptive stories at recess. Try to write one of those.”*

*I try to focus, but nothing happens. Everyone’s looking at me. They probably think I’m dumb.*

## Renderings

### Living Inquiry

*Some words are called descriptive words? What is she talking about?*

*Everyone is writing. I should write something too.*

*My handwriting looks messy.*

*What does acting out stories at recess have to do with creative writing?*

### Metaphor/Metonymy

*I am looking at a hologram. While it seems as though I should be able to reach out and grab print literacy, in reality writing is two-dimensional and inaccessible...*

*—somewhere out there—*

### Openings

*While Mrs. McNaughton tries to provide an opening—a space for me to participate—I am too trapped in the critical and assigned positions of others (e.g., they think I am dumb) to engage.*

As an acorn, I had fallen into what Stephen Goodman (2003) calls the *language gap*: a disconnected space where a child who has fallen behind in earlier years, although trying, fails to academically catch up to his/her peers (p. 34). I remember craving more time to draw, act, or sing in school. Yet when offered the opportunity to write a descriptive story, like the ones I acted out on the playground, I struggled.

This journal entry, when set alongside the a/r/tographic analyses, reminds me that teachers of writing sometimes need to make connections for students. Mrs. McNaughton often did this through private dialogues with students. She would post problems to small groups or individuals and invite us to voice or talk about our own stories. She seemed to believe that the teacher is not merely “one-who-teaches”; rather, through collaboration and conversation, the teacher and students become jointly responsible for the process in which participants all grow (Friere, 1970).

Today, in addition to a variety of modes, some scholars see authorship as a dynamic and complex process that derives from a lifetime of connections (Stein, 2008). Writing originates in the cumulative human experiences and in the multiple *discursive positions* we have assumed and assigned (cf. Harré and Davies 1996; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain 1998; Sumara 2002). A/r/tography acknowledges this interaction, providing a methodology that suggests rich sociocultural and creative entanglements and invites detailed inquiries into the processes of artistic meaning-making.

### *Pushing against the Earth*

Education is political, says activist and drama educator Augusto Boal (1985), because speakers can adopt interpretations or storylines, assigning positions to others in ways that might not be entirely accurate. In the example above, I adopted a storyline of struggle and a position of helplessness. Others assigned a similar storyline and position to me. And though it wasn't accurate, I felt dumb and others thought of me as reluctant, or worse — lazy and/or unwilling to try.

Davies and Harré (1996) suggest that power is also flexible, because people have agency and because relationships shift within each new context or situation. People can speak back to systems of power or contribute to new conversations, assuming different positions, or pursuing alternative storylines. Rather than continuing to assume the role of an acorn, I refuted this claim, refusing to be positioned as an illiterate (See Figure 4).

Figure 4  
*Disruptions and openings: Freeing myself from assigned positions of illiteracy*



After years of being positioned as illiterate, dull-witted, or lazy, I was determined to re-position myself. The new position that I assumed is explained below and demonstrated through spoken word poetry. Specifically, in grade 11, I was asked to write my first critical reflection. Again, I felt confused; I am supposed to do what? I struggled with the *academic-ness* of the assignment and felt unprepared. Yet I knew that I needed to pass the course if I wanted to go to university. Instead of thinking about this assignment as a critical reflection, I chose to think of it as poetry — a rap. This simple shift made the assignment feel more personal and empowered me to write this spoken word piece (See Figure 5).

Figure 5  
*I'm going to university*

### Spoken Word Poetry

*'I'm going to university,' she sneered.*

*How about...you?'*

*Then it hit me like a linebacker  
slamming his opponent.*

*I am not going... not going... to university.*

*See, I'm in level four and only level five students  
can go to university.*

*I feel low.*

*As low as a teen's hip hop jeans.*

*I am low.*

*The lower of the low.*

*But that's not about to stop me.*

*No.*

*I resist. I persist. I insist... I have bigger hopes.  
Just like that ant that moves the rubber tree  
plant.*

*I stride down to the counselor's office into the  
first door I see.*

*'Average,' they say. 'You will stay in level four.'*

*Oh no.*

*No, no. Me? Average?*

*They can't stop me.*

*I storm through the second door.*

### Reflective Notes

#### Openings

*I was beginning to understand the  
rupture that was forming in my  
life. All my friends were going to  
university. I needed to go to too.  
Even the girl I disliked most at  
school was going to university.  
I needed to raise new questions  
and begin new dialogues if I was  
going to change the minds of  
these counselors.*

#### Excess

*Outside of the regulations and  
traditions set by the school board  
at the time, I wanted to be in  
level five so that I could go to  
university. I could imagine the  
future beyond the phenomena  
they prescribed. As Rita Irwin  
and Stephanie Springgay (2008)  
describe, I was searching for  
opportunities to complexify the  
simple and simplify the complex  
by questioning how things come  
into being and the nature of their  
existence.*

#### Metaphor/Metonymy

*"The world needs average  
students to learn about trades, to  
get average jobs."*

*'Your grades are average. You'll stay in level four and go to college.'*

*They shackle me with their words.*

*'You'll learn a trade like nursing or hairdressing.'*

*Oh no.*

*No, no.*

*They can't chain me.*

*Hairdressing? Shampooing heads and permanents?*

*Nursing? Dressing heads and residents?*

*No, no that's not for me.*

*I am going to university. I need more from life.*

*Then doubt sets in. Maybe they're RIGHT?*

*But I have bigger hopes. Just like that tiger that paces in the zoo.*

*Through door number three.*

*'I want to go to university.'*

*'Okay, we'll see,' said Mr. Donahue. 'We'll see what you can do. But you'd better try.'*

*I promise I'll try.*

*So he gave me a chance.*

*He believed in me.*

*And I went to university.*

*And won a scholarship in my Ph.D.*

*Thank you,*

*Mr. Donahue.*

*They chain and shackle me with their words.*

*Am I average?*

*"Average... grades... trades"*

*These are their words, not mine.*

As promised, I worked hard in that level five program, continuing to push against the earth that held me. I began to be noticed for my multimodal writing especially in drama (acting, technical designs), biology (pond studies and plant/animal catalogues), and physics (hands-on experiments and science projects). And at the same time, I forced myself to work with words, designing sense journals, recording observations using the scientific method, and scripting plays. I also talked to my English teachers about their expectations and learned how to compose an academic essay. I was gaining new understandings of what it meant to be a writer.

## SUMMER

### *Which Came First — The Tree or the Acorn?*

Summer was a warm season — a period of great happiness and cumulative successes. I pushed through barriers and spread my branches, expanding my knowledge about writing, teaching, researching, and art-making (See Figure 6).

*Figure 6  
Blossoms of Late  
Adolescence and  
Early Adulthood*



*The [girl] was at peace with [her] dream. [She] was happy just to care for the tree and to grow as it grew. (Casler 1994)*

In my twenties I moved away from home, travelled the globe, and studied theatre, specifically the ways that one uses the voice and the body to write a story. Other forms of knowing that I learned about in this season included visual art (See Figure 7), clowning, set/costume design, prop construction, light and sound design, carpentry, mime, and playbuilding.

*Figure 7  
Great happiness and  
cumulative successes.*



### **Contiguity**

*Actions are dependant on other actions.*

*Spaces of meaning-making can be connected to the literary?*

*For meaning is a continuous and connected mass?*

*Rather than being separate, all modes of meaning-making are proximal and constantly being reassembled.*

### **Living Inquiry**

*Attention needs to be given to the rich interconnections and life experiences that students bring tovarious forms of knowing.*

Looking back with the educator's lens, two ideas become clearer. First, to be an author, regardless of the mode, the student must learn through actual authorship — in whatever form it may take. She cannot become a prolific writer by simply listening to lectures, or studying the principles of writing; at some point the student must, with her own pen (or body, voice, etc.), experience and re-story the world from her own perspective (Murray, 2003). Being a writer means that you are involved in a self-investigative process because you always bring your background experiences, values, beliefs, and culture to the creation. Second, all meaning is connected and continuous. It takes place within the social lives of individuals and represents the experiences, beliefs, ideas, and values that they bring to bear as they design, negotiate, produce, and disseminate their lives. As educators, we need to consider that attention needs to be given to the processes of creations as well as to the products that are created.

Another question begins to emerge as I reflect through the educator's lens: what are the roles of form and content? Should I teach starting with a form and making the

content fit, or by starting with the content and letting the form emerge? This topic is debated in the field of literacy education. Donald Murray (2003) has a strong opinion about this topic:

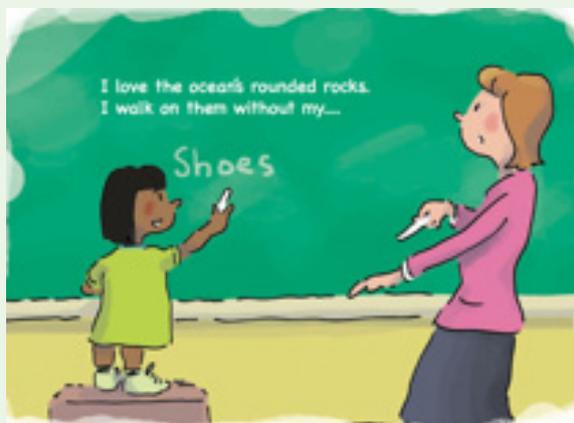
*Content and form, form and content — which comes first? The answer has to be content. Form is not an empty jug into which the writer pours meaning; form grows out of meaning, so much so that many writers come to believe that form, in a very real sense, is meaning. (p. 2)*

He believes that composing/conveying meaningful ideas is the most important aspect of writing; therefore content, rather than form, needs to be addressed by the teacher of writing. But perhaps it also depends on what the author values at the moment of mean-making. In other words, which takes precedence within the situational context: the process of creating or the product that is formed. As a way to explore this idea, I wrote a picture book (Reference withheld) that addresses this form/meaning dilemma (See Figure 8).

Figure 8  
Rhyme or Reason

**Rhyme or Reason**  
Written by: Kari-Lynn Winters  
Illustrated by: Scot Ritchie

**Process Think-aloud**



### Living Inquiry

*Form or content—which is more important to a writing teacher?*

*Like me, this character is determined to succeed. Yet she doesn't understand the teacher's requests.*

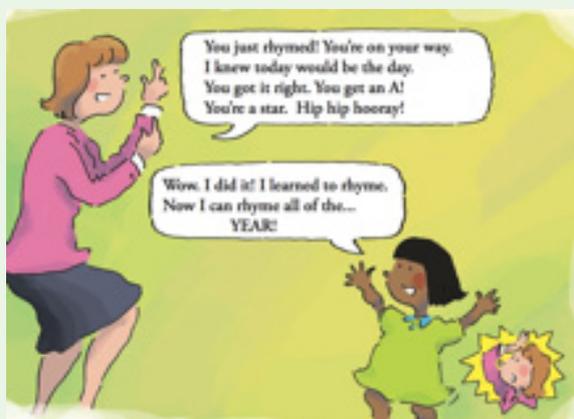
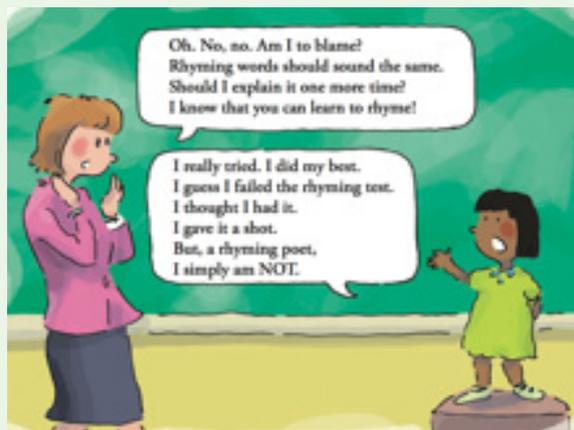
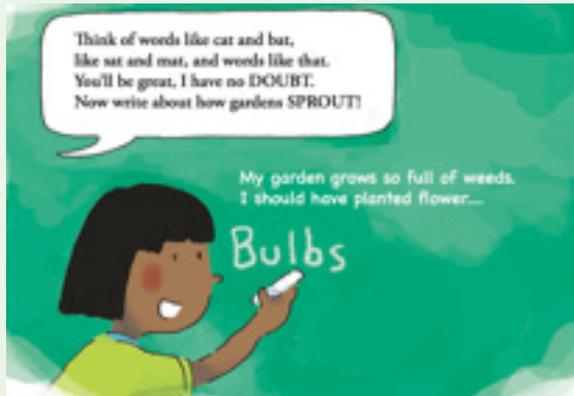
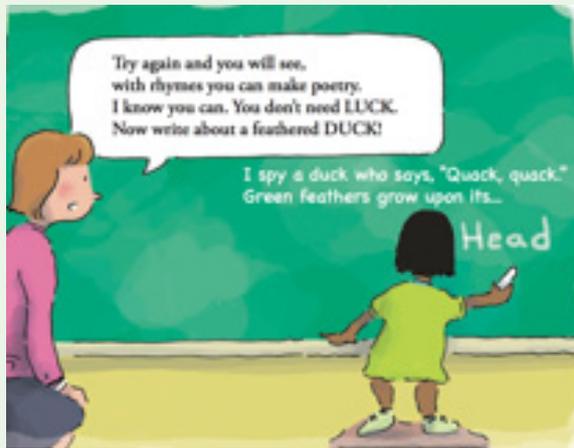
*The child is focused on the content, and wants the poem to make sense. The teacher, on the other hand, is highlighting the form — making a rhyme.*

*As the author of this piece, it is important to note that the poem is intended to be read aloud to or performed for young children. I had to consider this as I wrote it.*

### Excess

*Some people assume that poetry has to rhyme. Yet, not all poems rhyme.*

*Can un-rhyming verse for children be considered poetry too?*



## Openings

*When I first started teaching poetry I thought that by getting students to use a rhyming form would be easiest. I discovered that rhyming is difficult, especially for young children.*

*Later I found out from children's poet Avis Harvey (class notes, 2005) that rhyming shouldn't be used to teach beginners poetry. Harvey argues that beginning poets can easily forget about the meaning of their writing if they are forced utilize a specific and set form.*

## Reverberation

*Poems that capture my attention are the ones that tell a story — more specifically, a story I can relate to. I wanted to compose a poem that would appeal to kids, play with the form, and, most importantly, tell a story.*

## Contiguity

*Can the teacher and child be equal, existing simultaneously? Their actions/re-actions are dependent upon each other's actions/re-actions.*

Figure 9  
*Harvests of literary  
engagements*

Choosing content that I could identify with and writing a piece that investigated this issue enabled me to have a particular point of view towards the topic. And at the same time I realized that writing with a particular form offered me new ways to express myself, and alternative points of view. I could either write what I knew about the world or I could allow the world's structures to write me.

## AUTUMN

### *A Colourful Time*

Autumn was a colourful time, when many fruits of my labour began to ripen. Indeed, I was beginning to reap the rewards of many years' hard work (See Figure 9).



Three important things occurred during this season. First, I earned my teaching degree, taught in schools across North America, and completed my masters and Ph.D. in British Columbia. Second, inspired by my family, professors, and peers, I assumed a playwright/performer position at Tickle Trunk Players, a theatre company for young audiences. Third, I discovered that writers are researchers. Whether under the supervision of an advising professor or in my own home, I learned that researching is really about inquiry and exploration.

Through acts of theatrical writing (play building, sound, costume, set design, lighting, acting), picture book authorship, scholarly writing, and performance, I was also awakening what I call a critical writing consciousness (See Figure 10).

Figure 10  
A critical writing  
consciousness

## Spoken Word Poetry

*Black hair...*

*Short and free like a sea anemone.*

*Free-stylin' and artsy.*

*A player, a designer, a mask-maker.*

*She writes the world, the book, the play and  
begins to look back.*

*Re-writing her writing.*

*She lives for yesterday, the future, today...*

*Writing her world as it comes, yet making time  
for reflections.*

*But the world writes her too.*

*It grades her creations, gives her options,  
situations.*

*Changing who she is.*

*Showing her who she'll become.*

*It gives her the play. She plays the parts.*

*Yes, she plays the parts... the player, the designer,  
the mask-maker.*

*She makes the choices and writes her own style.*

*A song in her heart and a smile. She leaves  
heartprints.*

*Yes. She writes her own style.*

*Free-stylin' and artsy.*

*Making her mark like a dog in the park.*

*Her world writes her as she writes her world*

*At last [s]he began to learn what the acorn had to teach [her]. And, like the tree, [s] he  
grew. (Casler 1994)*

Authorship is about engaging in the practices of cultural art-making and research, while at the same time, inquiring about the world (see Figure 11).

## Reflective Notes

### Openings

- *If I come to know myself through writing, perhaps others can know me too?*
- *Can I come to know others through their writing?*

### Contiguity

- *Perhaps too, through writing I can learn to empathize with others, creating a symbiotic triad between critical theorizing, imagined creation, and active reflection. My identities have pluralized. I am an artist, a teacher, a researcher, and a writer.*

### Living Inquiry

- *Why edit writing? Will editing change the intent of the piece?*
- *If people critiqued my work, I would listen, but never do anything about it. I felt that editing might change my feelings about the lived, embodied moment.*

Figure 11  
Developing Roots  
and Branches



Authorship, through all its modes of representation, involves constructing new meanings and new identities and interconnecting these meanings to the understandings of other — a continuous branching and re-rooting. Friere touches on these ideas as he speaks about the role of man:

*The role of man [is] not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations with the world—that through acts of creation and re-creation man makes cultural reality and thereby adds to the natural world, which he did not make... (Friere, 2005, p. 39).*

Friere suggests that knowledge is full of relations and that the world is in constant dialogue. Each idea is preceded and then followed by an infinite number of linked ideas, reminding us that we are in a constant and critical engagement with others. Life is capacious and, at the same time, contagious.

Likewise, knowledge informed by a/r/tographic research is continually created, transformed, shifted, and dynamic. Questions evolve. Answers lead to new questions. How will I show my ideas? Who was I when I created that piece? How did my feelings change from that draft to this draft? And the dialogue continues.

The arts, especially theatre and visual art have taught me about being mindful of form, but also about taking risks, working collaboratively, and interpreting others' ideas. It was during this season that I learned the best writings were those that drew on themes, echoed the designs of others, and asked critical questions. In other words, the best writing resonates with others.

## WINTER

*With its roots deep in the earth the tree stood ready for winter. (Locker, 1995)*

Winter is my favourite season. I love its quiet wisdom. It is a time of rumination and reflection. As a writer, I do not know what the future holds — in fact, I am only beginning to understand the traces (i.e., strategies, ideas, memories, beliefs) that I carry with me. At one time, I may have felt stressed not knowing what will become of me as a writer. Today I am calm, trusting the process (See Figure 12).

Figure 12  
Trust in the process



*Like the oak, weighed down by snow and covered with frost, I know that I can stand tall, looking forward to new beginnings when spring sings again (See Figure 13).*

## Spoken Word Poetry

*The a/r/tographer re-packs her bags,  
re-writing what's already been written.*

*No idea is original.*

*She adds new detail, manipulating the words,  
the pictures, the gestures.*

*Traces of the past bubble out like baby belches.*

*These stories resound and reverberate,  
transform, and congregate.*

*Moving between us.*

*No idea is sluggish.*

*Our ears are hungry. They drool for more  
echoes of life.*

*Continuously wanting, needing, desiring one  
more story morsel.*

*Our ears swallow greedily. The taste of the  
words unique to each ear drum.*

*No idea is tasteless.*

*Her luggage sits patiently, filled with knowledge  
and memories, strategies and certainties.*

*She unlocks the magic. Her pen hits the paper,  
her body, the stage.*

*She rearranges the traces. Weaves the fabric.*

*Creates the enchantment.*

*Meaning explodes from the container, busting  
the latch, seeping into every space and future  
moment.*

*Leaving traces of its power.*

*Then the conjurer re-packs her bags, differently  
from before.*

*With new traces.*

*And moves on.*

## Process Think-Aloud

### Reverberation

- *Where do traces come from?*
- *I write my life, and my life writes me. I make choices, but ultimately, the choices are present because of where I am in the world.*

### Living Inquiry

- *It seems that all I've been doing these days is re-designing and re-thinking.*
- *Should I search for something new? Yet the assemblage is unique—through the process of re-mixing the words, the traces, it becomes re-storied.*
- *Does it make sense? Does it speak the truth? Does it paint a picture for the audience?*
- *Look for metaphor, alliteration, assonance, rhyme.*
- *Rework, revise, rewrite.*

This idea echoes Kamberelis and Scott's (1992) notion of living forward, and my own interpretations of being an a/r/tographer. Furthermore, this process transforms social and cultural experiences, particularly conversational experiences, into traces, which live on in individual people, contributing to their being and speaking forth whenever the individuals talk or write.

Have I become a seasoned writer? In some ways, yes. In many other ways, no. Though I have learned how to look around me to generate ideas for stories, to overhear conversations and explore the gaps, to craft a storyline and construct pieces of literary art that evoke feelings and ideas, I have also learned that I may never become a seasoned writer in all the ways that I believe are possible. Learning, like life, cycles and continues. Will I continue to continue to grow; extending full leaves and branches outwardly? Will I become a better writer? Maybe. Maybe not. But, without a doubt, I do know that writing, like all art, requires an on-going process.

I remember that I used to think being a writer meant getting published. Then I got published. Did that make me a writer? No, but it made me re-evaluate what it means to be a writer. Being a writer doesn't mean that you have to be a published expert who produces polished and profound manuscripts; rather, it means being a practitioner, and it means being open to the process of composing, interpreting, researching, and conveying meaning. This has been said before, both by authors (e.g. Fletcher, 1996; Goldberg, 1986; King, 2000; Paterson, 1981) and by writing researchers (Graves, 1994; Leggo, 2004; Murray, 2003). Writing is about living the writer's life. This includes noticing details, drawing upon past experiences, connecting with others, and being engaged with and immersed in thinking and communication.

I am reminded of Springgay's (2004) folding metaphor: the author is both attentive to the individual act of composition (the being inside of the fold) and to the social act of communication and negotiation (the being outside of the fold). This statement resonates with my mask-making journey, demonstrated throughout this article (See Figure 14). The winter mask, in particular, included several folds and creases, which added weight to clay. This additional weight made the face fall inwards slightly. I was instantly aware that the meaning that I was trying to communicate had been changed, and yet, the sagging face felt authentic. I was simultaneously balancing the meaning that I was composing versus the meaning that I was communicating. Indeed, I was simultaneously inside and outside of the fold.

Figure 14  
*Being simultaneously  
inside and outside  
of the fold.*



Meaning-making is always situated within individuals and their larger social and cultural frameworks. By assuming both stances (composer and communicator) the writer learns to “live poetically” (Leggo, class notes), discovering an infinite amount of ways to engage with and be in the world (Britton, 1970, p. 58).

Assembling past traces and being engaged in the practices of a/r/tography offers one way to inquire in the world, and in this case to better understand how the literary arts are interconnected with art-making, research, and teaching. Creating this assemblage has helped me make sense of the shifting and multiple professional identities I hold as an assistant professor, a teacher, an artist, a researcher, and a children’s author. But, more importantly, using a/r/tographic renderings for the purposes of inquiry has demonstrated that writing is an embedded interaction within multiple worlds, including the imaginary, the social, the critical, and the experiential. It doesn’t have to begin in a classroom, or when a child picks up a pencil or types on a keyboard. Nor it is not distinct from play or from the sociocultural, historical, and multimodal contexts in which it is embedded. Writing occurs throughout the day, everyday.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TEACHER OF WRITING?

Throughout this a/r/tographic journey I have come to know that writing is about actively engaging in a life-long process of thinking and learning. In the broadest sense it is about the ways that humans construct and convey meaning. Similarly, being a teacher of writing is not about the papers or stories students produce. Instead, it is about planting acorns, drawing upon knowledge and understandings, so that they can branch into independent and life-long meaning-makers. It is not the role of the teacher to inject knowledge into the reluctant mind of the writer, forcing them to know all that teacher knows (Murray, 2004, p. 129). Rather, teachers of writing need to know that “writing begins with awareness” (Calkins, 1994). Good teachers understand that writing is a process, which is multimodal, social, cognitive, and critical. It is both active and reflective — for writing is both internal and external at the same time. Donald Graves (1994) terms this internal/external positioning “active observation” (p. 153).

Lucy McCormick Calkins (1994), in her book *The Art of Teaching Writing*, suggests that by paying close attention we allow young writers to recognize the significance of their own lives, “demonstrat[ing] to them that their lives are worth writing about” (Calkins, 1994, p. 16). Similarly, Nancie Atwell (2002) suggests that in addition to being active observers, good writing teachers:

- Believe in writers and take their work seriously
- Help writers develop high expectations
- Get to know students beyond the classroom
- Use failure as a way to teach, not punish
- Continue to engage in their own learning

Although this may sound like a magic pill prescription for being a good teacher, I do not believe this is Atwell’s intention, for she notes that each learner is an individual with his/her own needs, problems, strengths. What works for one writer may not work for another; more so than anyone else, the young writer knows her own story. The above list merely calls attention to the attributes of great teachers.

## PUTTING THE ‘GRAPHY’ INTO A/R/TOGRAPHY

This a/r/tographic process has given me insights about the art of writing. But through the “graphy” aspect of this inquiry, I now understand what it means to:

1. Take on a student writer’s perspective when teaching. I know what it means to write, get stuck, compose faster than the hand can type, stare at the blank page, and so on. Writing about and analyzing my own processes will help me to understand the processes of others.
2. Teach in a “writerly” way. Though I have learned to identify the technical aspects of the literary arts and re-mix them in my own writing, being

engaged in the process of a/r/tography has confirmed that students not only need to learn about various techniques, but to realize how these techniques have the potential to evolve and be re-rendered in other aspects of their lives. For example, they can use various techniques such as dialogue (an important technique for writing plays or picture books) and weave them into different genres (spoken word monologues, academic papers, etc.).

3. Be authentic. There are real reasons for teaching students to write. Writing is not merely an exercise that we teach because it is in the curriculum. Rather, students write for numerous and real reasons (e.g. to record, to discover new ideas, to connect with others, to remember, to know). “When our students resist writing, it’s usually because writing has been treated as little more than a place to display — to expose — their command of spelling, penmanship, and grammar” (Calkins, 1994, p. 23).

Many articles have been written about the a/r/tographer’s path and its connections to the world, including the processes are art-making, research, and teaching. Yet critical debates about the “graphy” in a/r/tography are also crucial for it helps artists, researchers, and teachers to extend the boundaries of inquiry-based investigations.

## CONCLUSION

*Again we emphasize that in the practice we propose, learners begin to perceive reality as totality: whereas in a reactionary practice learners will not develop themselves, nor can they develop a lucid vision of their reality. (Friere, 1985, p. 14)*

Friere suggests perceiving reality as “totality.” Likewise, a/r/tography provides a methodology and analytic frame that demonstrates how the multimodal, the social, and the critical come together in relational, interwoven ways. A/r/tography witnesses reality as a totality — a complicated and messy assemblage that has the potential to bring about multiple ways of knowing.

In this paper, I have assembled traces from my past (poems, picture books, photographs, diaries, etc.) as a way to artfully make sense of my memories, research my daily life, and better my teaching practices. Creating this a/r/tographic assemblage deepened my understandings of the literary arts and what counts for writing. I also know my personal art-making, researching, teaching, and writing journey in a more intimate way than I did before entering into this research. Additionally, I have demonstrated ways that others might better understand how to teach writing through processes of “graphy” and art-making. In the past, I have realized that creative processes are never linear. Now I begin to demonstrate the complexity and interwoven nature of the art of writing, the research of writing, and the teaching of writing. Creative processes are not separate, but always layered, and interwoven.

Like the oak tree, teachers of writing move through the seasons, enduring the elements. Seemingly knowing that they and their students will continue to grow and develop as writers and as human beings. And they know that when winter’s cold stops them in their tracks, new seeds can be planted and spring will return. And when it does, they and their students will show a new leaf, and through artful inquiry the writing process will begin again.

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