

A Journey towards Self-Discovery via Sharing Stories, Experiences, Poetry and Prose, while blending them with the Different Roles we perform in our Daily Life

Raheela Zulfiqar
Institutional Instructor
Department of Justice
Fort Smith NT, Canada
Former Lecturer University of Management and Technology
Linguistics and Literature Department
Orcid ID: 0000-0003-4945-9990

Abstract

We define ourselves through our stories and experiences, and there lies a connection between our roles, that ties us together to give a true sense of who we are. The purpose of this research is to integrate art, experiences and the link between each role that I play every day, a process that connects art and experiences with the emphasis on self-discovery utilizing the research methodology of a/r/tography. I connect these roles into an experiential ritual as pedagogy, identifying art as research and curriculum-making, viewing daily experiences and stories, converting them into procedural learning, and providing awareness through one's understanding of own surroundings. The paper illustrate how by sharing my own stories, poems, and struggles, I am able to reach out to students and create connections. Through this approach, the learners can acquire from their past-which is a part of their present as they strive for their future goals. This connectedness fosters support, confidence, and a sense of belonging that facilitates learning. This paper responds to the interconnection that is inherent within the third space of ritual, and struggles are engaged with converting our roles daily. Furthermore, it challenges traditional learning, still embedded within our daily mindset. The objective of this procedure is to create an environment where learners can enhance their talents and develop their skills to the fullest extent possible.

Keywords: *A/r/tography, roles, connections, stories, experiences, aesthetic, connectivity, living-Curriculum.*



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I am an educator; mother, poet and writer with the desire to inculcate my personal experiences, stories and poetry into teaching. As a language teacher for the past thirty years, I am convinced that our stories describe us and that our experiences give us a sense of identity in relation to the different roles we play in our daily lives. For me the stories are the sole link that connects each of the characters we play and the way we act in each role, reveals our genuine personalities. In building a self-designed living curriculum, I believe it's imperative to understand these connections, otherwise, we'll never know who we really are. Once these connections are interconnected, we are able to experience a true transformation, revealing our individuality in a whole new light. It's "A process of exchange that is not separated from the body but emerges through an intertwining of mind and body, self and other, and through our interactions with the world" (Irwin and Springgay xxii). Creating a sense of self is impossible unless all the ¹dots come together to form a connection to our true self and allow us to acknowledge our inner potential in order to create an aesthetic of ourselves that originates from self-discovery. I believe a real aesthetic sense of knowing is to know and comprehend undoubtedly as Massumi explains "makes a vanishing point appear, where the interaction turns back in on its potential, and where that potential appears for itself. That could be a definition of producing an aesthetic effect" (9). I strive to construct a unique paradigm that connects learners' various roles to an invisible circadian rhythm not only attached to physical but also to their spiritual world with the expertise to interlink their daily roles to cultivate genuine knowledge. It's a step by step process that begins with discovering all the roles we play in daily life, identifying connections, linking them through stories and experiences, and finally, finding our true selves across every platform, creating an environment of genuine self-realization towards a continuous self-discovery practice. Furthermore, I believe that developing professionally and personally begin with knowing ourselves. "We engage in self-study work because we believe in its inherent value as a form of professional development" (qtd. in Leggo 5). No doubt that developing in every area of our lives is rooted in Leggo's belief that professional growth is intrinsically linked to self-study.

¹ Dots are a representation of the various roles we play in our daily lives. As a result, I believe that once we connect them together at one central point, they will provide us with a deeper sense of self. As we learn about ourselves, we are guided towards creativity, which is crucial to our growth.

It's quite normal for me to perform different characters in my daily routine. The moment I have to perform a role; I transform into that character without hesitation. I switch from one role to another naturally, without even giving a single thought. It amazed me how efficiently and simply, I was able to morph into various characters. A dedicated mother, committed teacher, thoughtful writer and a visionary poet while performing all these roles every day at different times and places; I have re-appropriated educational methods into the art of experiential learning through my stories and experiences. The performance of my daily roles is interrelated like a rhizome that can produce roots of a new plant under the soil; rhizomes that grow vertical, letting new shoots grow up out of the ground when detached; each piece is capable of producing a new plant. In the same way, productions of new characters develop branches and roots that interconnect and provide essential support to each other spontaneously and quietly, just as each role possesses the ability to grow even though it acts separately at various times and places.

An Exceptional Method of Research

With the help of A/r/tography, I embrace a method that enlightened teachers to understand the complexity of learners' different roles, their aesthetic abilities and experiences. It is an incomparable method that allowed me to get the most out of my research and I found it to be a uniquely powerful and effective method for conducting my research. While practicing and connecting my different characters within a/r/tography, the clarity of living curriculum provided me with a strong relationship to all my roles and transforms my teaching strategies toward a clear track. "A/r/tography is all about that inquiry into becoming, into Being. It is all about the creation of knowledge, the creating of oneself, the creating of world around us" (Irwin et al 10). Through A/r/tography and auto-experiential, I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of experience-based, transformative research, which has helped me to develop an expanded identity as an A/r/tographer. Through this identity I develop a critical approach that brought a straight forward and clear path through a/r/tography. As O'Sullivan explains "reflexive action sparked by a creative impulse that can help to see things in a critically different way" (Sullivan 242). A/r/tography as the form of inquiry weaves together the roles of poet, writer researcher, teacher/educator, and mother through a self-reflexive internal collaborative practice of art experiencing and learning. This unique offer of A/r/tography recommend a researcher to challenge himself by driving to the isolated roads and suggest a process to build new routes to

link these roads to an intersection that takes the research in all directions and propose exceptional opportunities to discover new lands. The lands where tradition and modernism can be synthesized to benefit the new growth of learning that can support every aspect of life. As Irwin states, “a/r/tography is about each of us living a life of deep meaning enhanced through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden, create what has never been known, and imagine what we hope to achieve” (36).

“Make a rhizome. But you don’t know what you can make a rhizome with, you don’t know which subterranean stem is going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment” (Deleuze and Guattari 251). No doubt that A/r/tography is an extraordinary way of research that provides an inimitable atmosphere where the researcher can create from a single stem, produce new roots, grow and generate an innovative structure to harvest a distinctive way of research through art. In my opinion, it’s a unique way of research that offers infinite opportunities to the researcher. “A/r/tography is a living inquiry of unfolding art forms and text that intentionally unsettles perception and complicates understandings through its rhizomatic rationality” (Irwin et al 18). A/r/tography indeed provided me with the opportunity as a researcher to convert my living experiences and roles into a living curriculum that can transform it into a ceremonial event and bring the best knowledge to self-identification. Through this method, I have grown into new characters that are intertwined with each other and their connections and roles are a thoughtful endeavor of my routine. As a result of this fact of connectivity, I combined them into one central point to gain a deeper understanding of who I am; it has been a powerful tool for helping me to gain an understanding of myself that has led me to self-discovery, a true example of experiential learning through narrative.

A/r/tography The Most Relevant

I was amazed at the wide options of research in A/r/tography. In my understanding, it is a unique perspective of research that allows us to bring creative components through diverse methods of research. “A/r/tography is a living practice of art, research, and teaching: a living metissage; a life-writing, life-creating experience” (Irwin et al. 32). In other words, it is an aesthetic way of presenting research through social, personal, political and living experiences. “A/r/tographical research is not subject to standardized criteria, rather it remains dynamic, fluid, and in constant motion” (Irwin and Springgay xix) “A/r/tography is an art and education

practice—a based research methodology that emphasizes living inquiry and an examination of the spaces between arts—making/researching/teaching” (Carter et al 18). “A/r/tographers see themselves as artists and as researchers and as educators/learners continually developing their abilities, skills and expertise over time” (Irwin et al 10). For me as a researcher, A/r/tography is like an open window that lets daylight into my room, while at night, a vision of beautiful stars suggests a journey into unknown worlds. These mysterious realms refresh and confine my knowledge. A/r/tography enables my connections to my present and future, which are then converted into a sense of inquiry, I believe it is a significant step toward self-realization, which opens up many doors for the researchers, broadens their view of the world and brings new horizons to widen their perceptions. “A/r/tography as living inquiry necessarily opens the way to describing and interpreting the complexity of experience among researchers, artists and educators, as well as the lives of the individuals within the communities they interact with. As a result, it also opens the topics, contexts and conditions of inquiry” (Irwin and Springgay xxv). As O’ Sullivan defines “this is art’s function: to switch our intensive register, to reconnect us with the world, the first letter of A/r/tography, art opens us up to the no-human universe that we are part of” (128). In the word itself, the “r” stands for research as “A/r/tography is a research methodology that entangles and performs what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari refer to as a rhizome. A rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum” (Irwin and Springgay xx). In this context, the rhizome’s connectivity, as it has no beginning and no end, and is interconnected through the roots, makes it unique. A wide focused research method has a lot to offer, “It is an interstitial space, open and vulnerable where meanings and understandings are interrogated and ruptured. Building on the concept of the rhizome, a/r/tography radically transforms the idea of theory as an abstract system distinct and separate from practice” (xx). The “t” relates to teachers as “A/r/tography is steeped in the practices of artists-educators committed to ongoing living inquiry and it is this inquiry that draws forth the identity of a researcher” (xxv). “Artist/researcher/teacher identities contiguously exist in relationship to one another” (qtd. in Irwin and Springgay xxv). It is a method that is enriched with versatility and rejects typical ways of research that have very little to offer. This is one of the reasons that researchers look forward to experimenting with a/r/tography within its framework but under their perceptive and techniques. It’s a dream of a researcher to try-out new ways that can offer an exclusive style of

research. In my dissent, I believe that my experiences and stories have enriched my personality as a language teacher for almost three decade. As a result of the feeling of resourcefulness, I was able to gain a better understanding of myself while sharing and learning “A/r/tographers have rich experiences in teaching and learning that have called them to inquire into the world, to be curious, to seek questions, to seek greater understanding, and to create meaning as the sharing of their Being” (Irwin et al 10). It was for this reason, that I chose A/r/tography to bring my personal experiences and stories into my educational life while connecting my various roles to each other to provide a strong connection to my research as a/r/tography is “embedded in living experience” (Springgay 159) This is a great tool for keeping researcher motivated as well as filling in the gaps in as go along with research “One purpose of a/r/tography is to open up conversations and relationships instead of informing others about what has been learned. Another purpose of a/r/tography is to open up possibilities for a/r/tographers as they give their attention to what is seen and known and what is not seen and not known” (Irwin and Springgay xxx).

I am always enthusiastic to appreciate something more spontaneous to bring to my stories and poetry in the form of an autobiography as a lived curriculum. I certainly believe that “A/r/tography and artistic inquiry methods have guided me to new concepts of study that help me define new intersubjective and relational formations and subjectivities” (qtd. in Springgay 26). These “intersubjective and relational formation and subjectivities” have a great role to play in the understanding of our true association with our research methodology which brings deep relations to significant truth, a truth of “being and becoming” (Norman, 39). Therefore, a rationale for discovery is certainly a query of subjectivity that must be translated into the most suitable and convenient methodology. Within this context, I choose narratives and poetry to write my personal experiences as “It honors and supports my long commitment to autobiographical writing” (Springgay 4). Another main reason to acknowledge a/r/tography is its openness to reconstruction that commits to further growth “a/r/tography radically transforms the idea of theory as an abstract system distinct and separate from practice. In its place, the theory is understood as a critical exchange that is reflective, responsive and relational, which is continuously in a state of reconstruction and becoming something else altogether” (qtd. in Springgay 4). The fundamental conversion of the idea of theory into a conceptual method is a

miracle of a/r/tography. It makes more sense to a researcher as the depth of investigation gives an understanding of presenting something relevant and more thoughtful, which can later bring a true sense of belonging and self-realization through a/r/tographical research. For me, as a mother/teacher/writer/poet, “autobiographical writing is both transcendent and immanent, both inside and outside, both internal and external, both personal and public” (5).

My stories are not only about myself, they have connections like rhizomes to all my characters; I cannot think as a singular entity for I possess interconnectivity within me – teacher/student/mother/poet/writer and my political and social world. My personal experiences have all that is related to all these characters surrounding me - and yet at the same time, they are all part of my lived curriculum, so it is imperative that I write about myself, “We need to write personally because we live personally, and our personal living is always braided with our other ways of living----professional, academic, administrative, artistic, social, and political” (Springgay 5). I am a combination of all my characters and undoubtedly, all these characters have a specific role to play in my life where all these entities combine to widen my thoughts and provide me with a different perspective of life. A/r/tography provides me a way to explore identities of all these characters and between these identities lays my true self. “A/r/tography as practice-based research is situated in the in-between, where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry” (Irwin and Springgay xxi). According to Elizabeth Groz:

The Space of the in-between is the locus for social, cultural and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place-the place around identities, between identities-where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrips the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity. (qtd.in Irwin and Springgay xx).

Combination

When I live in various characters,

I perform each role differently,

As a strong mother,

Thoughtful, critical teacher,

Provocative poet,

Writer of ordinary things,

*And A Student of living objects,
Performing these roles every day
Spontaneously and regularly,
Provide me a glimpse of my society,
At different times and places,
These characters live together,
In one body and soul,
Connected with,
My family, students
And myself
I am a combination of
Abstract me.
(Raheela)*

Connections and stories

My story is complex yet beautifully simple; painted with strokes of struggle, passion, tears, love and determination. I am a teacher, creative mom, passionate writer and poet. I always like to share my experiences of struggle with my students. Furthermore, I believe that these stories give them hope with a sense of determination. Being a teacher for the past thirty years in my home country and Canada, I have experienced the very deep connections between stories, writing and language learning. My students write and orally relate stories in my classroom. We share our experiences and feel connected. I believe, many times, I felt an atmosphere of an organic relationship in my classes, a strong unknown connection between me and my students established by creative writing and sharing our experiences. These shared experiences and connections allow us to relate and discover our roles in everyday life. As Leggo explains, "I am committed to exploring the lively intersections between critical discourse and creative discourse" (4). My commitment to "exploring the lively intersections" through stories and experiences "to challenge conventions, and to seek truth" (Leggo 3). Furthermore, "we tell stories of our lives, and we reveal ourselves in intimate ways and we grow more confident in our conviction" (4). In my opinion, stories are a living circle, a forever turning wheel, and we always move in between our past, present and future. Experiences are always unique for everyone. My experience can

have a connection with yours but there is a sense of uniqueness in both. Two people can have the same adventure but their experiences and story will be completely different. This uniqueness is valuable for human creativity.

My relationship with students gets stronger as I create a comfortable environment bringing their own experiences and stories into the classroom that provides them an atmosphere to have understood not only themselves but also their surroundings and relationships with others. I experienced different outcomes during our sessions while bringing past through narratives. Occasionally, it hurts and brings pain, fear, anxiety, and hidden traumas; such experiences have their benefits and challenges, but they also offer a kind of relaxation therapy. During this journey, we discover our own identity spontaneously attached to everyone around us. Norman writes, “I pull my selves and the selves of the others with whom I am in relationship back out of the moon, and attempt to un/cover and complicate the relationships we form, hold and lose in the lived curriculum of our worlds: home, school, academy, and earth” (44).

Relationships can be discovered and defined only by understanding each other and there is enough power in these relations to convey the interior self of each individual. This understanding requires self-discovery, which is the most important aspect of our characters. Bringing those narratives and experiences as seeds and planting them in our soil is a journey of self-realization; by growing inward, these seeds find and enter a bond with one another, while their shells enable their roots to breathe, creating the necessary nutrients for them to grow and thrive. It is the beauty of narratives and self-discovery that comes with it. In my experience, most of us to some extent unconsciously delete our hard times memories but they stayed attached and we reluctantly transform them into learning experiences that prepare us for what lies ahead. In my opinion, the rise comes from fall and the rule of gravity attracts each object downwards but it's not necessarily a fall it's an experience of a lifetime to bring more motivational energy to rise again. As Pinar said, “The self who rows with golden oars is a self constantly contracting losing its gravity so it may rise, expensive toward the sky” (220). There is a little doubt that it is an especially difficult task if you write honestly about your experiences; there is a fear of truth, disappointments and frustrations but at the same time the hope of growing and the excitement of learning. With all these positive and negative possibilities, we share and as Springgay explains so beautifully “We tell stories of our lives, and we reveal ourselves in intimate ways, and we grow

more confident in our conviction about the power of words for writing our lived stories, and transforming our living stories, and creating possibilities for more life-enhancing stories” (3-4). Indeed, as we move in our circles and build stories by moving to different places, these experiences are born in that circle by meeting others. These observations are building knowledge for upcoming generations to learn through the stories of the past, a treasure that needs to be saved. It is an honest effort, a gift to build connections with the physical and spiritual worlds. For me, research is a kind of transformation of our unique ideas from mind and body. I believe that our body lives in every moment with all its gifted senses. Therefore, writing stories and poetry is a description of living in, and with that moment of belonging – never mind if you cannot recall or picture every moment of your experience but it is there and we lived with it. I questioned myself: what is an essential part of my educational experience with my students and as a student with my teachers? At that very moment, I had a strong realization that I always collect and share stories and poetry with students and teachers. Indeed, I am a storyteller and collector; I need to define myself by digging deeper to find out who am I? Outstanding mentorship involves giving students the knowledge and skills to understand and harness their power, but eventually, to reach their full potential, you must realize your own power and express yourself. My quest for a deeper understanding of myself requires me to reveal my own observations through narratives, “I am committed to exploring the lively intersections between critical discourse and creative discourse” (Leggo 4). “you are under orders to be yourself ----for the system. You have to reveal yourself for who you are. In fact, you become who you are in expressing yourself” (Massumi 9).

The best part of my journey is collecting stories through verbal, visual and experiential learning. Most of the time I feel like Patrick Lane who said “I am crowded by stories too many to put down” (qtd. in Springgay 6). I also realize that it is not simply about my personal experiences, but it is also an aesthetic response of a writer, poet, teacher, mother and student; it is, in fact, about learning through the experiences of the many roles in my life. In the midst of not knowing towards knowing is a sagacity of aesthetic knowledge which takes us on a new journey of awareness. Thomas believes, “The potential impact of an embodied aesthetic experience lies in its lingering, saturating effects to spark creative impulse, invoke a human mind and spirit, imagine beyond the immediacy of perceptions and sensations, to transform the world” (15). Infact, the pedagogy of narratives gives a great sense of transformation of the body into the soul.

An aesthetic gain of knowledge, a revolutionary change to an individual, creates and raises esteem for aesthetic knowledge of self-identification. Ellsworth describes, “Aesthetic experience is like the experience of the learning self” (162). For me, stories are an aesthetic way of looking at experiences of our past. There are times in our past when we had to confront certain difficult experiences but without the past, as Lane writes, “without the past, I can’t learn to live in the unfolding present” (qtd.in Springgay6). In order to deal with some of our more troublesome past experiences in a positive and constructive way, we must face them in a way that makes us stronger and more resilient. It’s not only our perception; it is also others who are connected with our past. These narratives are built by bricks of memories. Fulford explains, “By initiating our own life experience, the narrative gives us a way to absorb past events on an emotional as well as an intellectual level” (qtd in Springgay 6). Furthermore, the beauty of our previous experiences stays in our hearts with all its misery or delight, for this attachment makes us keen observers of the present and brilliant planners of the future. Being in the teaching profession, I am a part of my students’ past, present and future, and as being a part of their experiences, I must celebrate this opportunity to bring the best out of them and our narratives to build greater connections.

For me, education is not just to follow a given school curriculum, but rather it is a world in which a teacher is more than just a mentor; where he/she can bring out the best from learners by dispensing knowledge about his/her life, from the trivial nuances to the greatest scientific inventions. Leggo writes beautifully:

I invite my students to write creatively, interrogatively, and expressively. I encourage them to take risks, to experiment with diverse discourses, to challenge conventions, and to seek truth. Ideally, in my writing and narrative inquiry classes, I want to nurture a vibrant community where our differences of opinions, beliefs, experiences, and personalities can be celebrated. We write and share our writing with one another. We tell stories of our lives, and we reveal ourselves in intimate ways, and we grow more confident in our conviction about the power of words for writing our lived stories, and transforming our living stories, and creating possibilities for more life-enhancing stories. (3-4)

Creating an environment that triggers students’ passion for creativity and allows them to gain a sense of alignment with their best identity is the power of a teacher. This is what I am passionately working on.

I would like to share one of my poems here:

Passion

*Passion takes me high and low,
Body dispersing into thin air,
Explosions, Loud like a trumpet;
The sinking boat, a tragic event,
The survivor, sea and shore,
Empty shells gather all around,
Wet sand and the sea foam,
And I... I will plant pearls in them*
(Raheela)

Shadows of Experiences

When I was a little girl, I was amazed by shadows, the reason for which I never sought but I could not get them out of my mind. I enjoyed watching my shadow contort and change every time I struck a new pose – it was the best kind of fun for a girl my age. Curiosity entailed surprises, and I felt that my body was but an obedient slave who performed as I wanted it to. Sometimes, in a want to get rid of my shadow, I hid, ran about and even draped myself with clothes. But, bizarrely, there existed no place where I could be alone with only just my body without its shadow tailing behind. Sometimes, I question: can we truly get rid of our shadows? Yes! someone exclaimed, perhaps out of ignorance or simply refusing to take note of it, but – and I believe – was said instinctively. Even though there are times when we hardly recall their existence, our silhouettes are still every part of us. The idea of having a shadow within us took me into a struggling conversation between my “self” and my “teacher-self” (a passionate teacher in me relates everything with teaching and pedagogies of teaching). The Teacher explains the role of shadows with a different perspective as shadows are like our past which always stays with us; all our experiences of life good or bad, sweet or sour, sad or happy stay with us and we cannot separate ourselves from them. To elaborate, all my students carry their previous experiences with them in their classrooms and at that very moment, when they are sitting with each other, they all have different stories and experiences right there with them so their past comes with them in the form of silhouettes. By neglecting that part or ignoring these shadows, we cannot claim that they are not there. As a teacher, I always consider that they are a vital part of their being. Why can't I just ignore these shadows? As I question myself, I get an immediate

answer: they are not there to avoid or ignore, because their experiences are infused with traditional values and social beliefs. The shades of the past are inseparable from us and as they discover their shadows (past), they can share their experiences and stories in class and create a rhizomatic effect; attachment brings strength, strength brings confidence. It is essential for me as an educator that my students feel connected to me and each other. Obtaining this connectivity requires discovering who they are and their identities within their circles - we can't harmonize without understanding these factors. I believe that schools at present are severely deficient in this valuable bond because we only emphasize curriculums and syllabuses. "For most public and private school children, the models of "learner" presented to them clash with who they are and the identities encouraged at home" (qtd in Pinar 202). Bringing these homemade identities into the classroom and in conjunction with their present classroom culture can encourage them towards attaining a self-identity.

Power of stories and surroundings

In my career, I have experienced many stories that have deeply affected me and made me realize how my reaction affects my role as a teacher. While searching for my real self I tried to connect with stories of my surroundings to learn how they influenced and form a connection to my everyday roles. My ethics, morals and biased or non-biased opinions were challenged through these stories so I brought a story that provided me with a true revolutionary sight of my inner-self and thoughts.

Not long ago when Qandeel Baloch was a blazing hot topic on Pakistani social media. Different channels took advantage of her to get high ratings by bringing hot news and interviews to viewers. She had almost one million followers on Facebook and Instagram. She was bold, determined and a self-promoter. In my opinion, Pakistani media was the murder of Qandeel Baloch by her brother in the name of honor, backed by a society where, even in this current year of rising progressive thought, there is no negotiating with honor and traditions. Baloch, a Pakistani model, actress, feminist activist and social media celebrity, rose to prominence due to the controversy caused by her unabashed videos. During the evening of July 15, 2016, Baloch was asphyxiated while she was asleep in her parents' house in Multan. She was only 25 years old. Her brother Waseem confessed to the murder saying she was bringing disrepute to the family's honor.

That night was heavy on me and was miserable, sad and I moved to write a poem in my native tongue and shared it on my Facebook.

Translated, reads:

Wow!

It's funny that you as a male sustain prostitution,

You enjoy their bodies when it's dark,

In the morning you turn into a virtuous man,

A man of the book and justice,

Oh, how hypocritical are you?

You pretend that you are the noblest,

Your hypocritical words have the power to ban,

Those night girls in the morning,

You pretend to be pious and noble,

You think you are better than her,

Oh, no you are inferior to her,

At least what she does,

She does not act to be noble and virtuous,

She is who she is,

She does everything honestly,

Unlike you who hide and pretend,

She is above your station,

For she is not a hypocrite,

You kill her in the name of honor,

How cowardly are you?

(Raheela)

While I read the news of Baloch's murder, I contemplated what role our education plays in bringing awareness to our society. I remember discussing these controversial issues in my high school classes during debating sessions. There were always two far sides to the issue being discussed and I listened to both, trying to draw some semblance of understanding from either

voice. It shocked me when my seventeen to eighteen years old (mostly male) students tried to justify honor killing. Over a decade worth of education did not change their views, already molded by family tradition. “Those women are oppressed in Pakistan is merely a Western stereotype”, I always tried to convince myself as I listed countless instances in my mind, yet every day, I hear of another woman murdered in the name of honor, I am plagued with nightmares. Strangely, honors killing have lots of justification in our society and it’s a kind of necessary action to save the family’s honor. A horrible crime, normalized for decades in our society. A woman was murdered in the name of honor and the murderer was freed after getting a pardon from the family was it an act of justice? And what a strange society this is that believes in a Prophet who honored every woman of his community and believed that the best man is that who respects and honors women; a society that believes in a Book which declares the two sexes as equals: Surah an-Nisa 4:1 states that men and women are created from a single soul (nafswahidah). One person does not come before the other, one is not superior to the other, and one is not the derivative of the other. A woman is not created for the purpose of a man and vice-versa.

There are certain forbidden topics in Pakistani society that we don’t want to discuss openly or even acknowledge their existence. We need to bring a great change in society but first, we need to change ourselves. Without changing our thoughts we cannot see a change within our society. I would like to quote Springgay who believes:

Awareness of our own self can bring change within us and it grows towards our society. It is my goal to guide my students toward critical awareness of identity construction that is not limited to given and pre-accepted categories and classifications. To do so, I consider it my responsibility to first study myself and expose my contextual understanding of my identity to critical inquiry. This is achieved through my intensive artistic work with moving water to gain a new understanding of self. (25)

Furthermore, it is the true role of a teacher to understand his/her self in order to bring a revolutionary transformation in society. But to achieve this, one must first need to discover the center of knowledge and understanding, as without that it is impossible to achieve what society needs to attain, as Irwin believes that “The roles of artist-researcher-teacher often cause inner struggles as individuals attempt to carry the weight of disciplinary traditions and achievements while experimenting with and creating new forms of knowing, doing, and making (30).

Qandeel's story brought lots of questions to me. It provided me with a keen evaluation of myself and my students. As a teacher, I always felt responsible to guide my students in the right direction and provide them a platform where they can learn by questioning typical mindsets and wrong traditions of society. It was not an easy task at the time to show them the horror of honor killing in our society, especially when it is deep-rooted in our culture for centuries. I found it a challenging topic by bringing into my classroom as an academic debate. It uncomforted some of my female students as they were not used-to of discussing bold topics publicly but when the discussion started and they found a comfortable atmosphere they were not hesitant to share their opinions. I felt that this debate brought lots of awareness among my students, they shared many stories and lash back at our justice system. I felt real learning was happening at the moment during that session.

Iqbal Hussain a rebel Painter and a Teacher

Back in 2016, I took my white American friend to Cooco's Den which is located in the Walled City in Lahore, on his desire to taste authentic Punjabi cuisine. It was my first coming to a place (back in 2000) where no noble and honorable family would permit their women to be because of the restaurant's proximity to the city's rather famous red-light district, Heera Mandi (literally, Diamond Market) The eatery was in a small old house that had been renovated in line with traditional aesthetics to awe younger folk but the most striking part about the interior was of it the numerous paintings of chained, dejected, and miserable women adorning its walls. I had some prior knowledge about the owner, Iqbal Hussain, who was also an artist, yet these pictures incited in me a deep curiosity about their subjects and the man who captured their likeness. I searched for him online and was much impressed by his story. He was born in Heera Mandi and struggled painfully to gain recognition as an artist in a society, where he was denounced as a sinner for being born from sin. However, his strong talent gained him admission into a prestigious school for arts where he did not shy from declaring his identity in front of his classmates. Minhas writes "Iqbal Hussain is the enfant terrible of Pakistan. He is unconventional, outspoken, radically innovative, avant-garde and more – all of which appears starkly in his paintings" (par.1). In a society where countless Qandeel Balochs are killed in the name of honor, it is a sigh of relief to see an artist utilizing his artistic talent and skill to bring to the fore those outliers shunned by a hypocritical society. "Exploited by the elite and condemned by the devout,

the working girls of Heera Mandi, Lahore's red-light district, earn their livings on the margins of society. But to artist Iqbal Hussain, who grew up in a family of prostitutes and now uses the women as models for his impressionistic portraits, they are his muse" (Themelisting).

For me, Iqbal Hussain is a seminal example of an artist/researcher and teacher who experiments with his art and brings his experiences alive in his paintings. Springgay mentioned "Artist/researcher/teachers, through multiple identities, give attention to the in-between" (18), and quotes "Where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time... [and create] the circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding through artistic and educational inquiry laden processes. (qtd in Springgay 18). Undoubtedly, he used this aforementioned knowledge to portray his experiences and ideology through his paintings. His journey continued, and he decided to bring rich Lahori culture and food to his restaurant near Hira Mandi, which ironically is considered to be an elite dining experience for tourists in Lahore. He, who never hid his identity, never pretended to be noblest, gained his self-respect and brought the true face of our society. His paintings hanging on the walls are worth millions but they are above the price demanding justice for not only Iqbal Hussain but also for these prostitutes who are chained and forced into a profession they have never been given a choice to choose.

French writer Claudine told reporters in one of her interviews during her book inauguration Hira Mandi, based on the life story of Iqbal Husain, the son of a Hira Mandi courtesan. "Iqbal is a misfit of an artist in Pakistan, where "even talking about prostitutes is a taboo" ("Lahore's Hira Mandi: A Love Affair"). I do believe he is indeed a misfit, but he is also a model in attaining a real self-identification as both student and teacher, and an exception in bringing his subjects and experiences alive in his painting to unveil the true look of two-faced society. "Create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before" (Minhas par. 8).

Rebel

In the name of religion,

We are playing a game of power,

A game of heaven and hell,

I am an ordinary person;

Want to live my life as a gift,

*Not an obedient servant of those,
Who are shallow and hypocrite,
They judge me through my appearances,
Why do I care?
Why do I obey?
I am the master of my faith,
They call me a rebel,
Yes, I disobey,
Unfair traditions and unjust rules,
I don't care what those,
High ranked so-called divine gods,
Think of me,
I just care to be happy,
As my Master cares for me,
Loves me if I love His people,
So an angel whispered to me,
"Who think they are
better and high,
God ranked them low"
(Raheela)*

Displacement to placement

It was my first class for my first semester at U of R; I was genuinely excited as it was my first time being in a university classroom. I wanted to meet new people, as I already had a pleasant experience meeting my five roommates, all of whom were from different countries. In my excitement, I came quite early. My teacher was extremely friendly and we spent some precious few minutes talking during which I shared my background with him. I sat in the front row of the class, but as students started to pour in, I noticed no one sat next to me. There were eighteen of us, two South Asians and a girl from Cameron (black girl) sat in the aisle seats to my left while all the white students sat together. Feeling uncomfortable, I looked around and flashed a smile to my white classmates but was dejected when they made no response. In that moment,

being an outsider, I felt stressed and unwelcome. My professor started talking about his Ph.D. thesis regarding racism, and it saddened me that within my first 25 minutes as a student, I was already being discriminated against. Out of the world of books and television programs, this was my first real taste of racism. I could not sleep that night, the sheer banality of the fact that people discriminated against the color of one's skin keeping me awake. This experience remained the same for my other classes and I was driven to work alone for group projects, oftentimes being forcefully assigned to a group by the professors. I sat by myself, or if I had the chance to the company of another, I was ignored. I did not understand if they were racist, but I started to feel that it might be after listening to certain lectures about white privilege. Maybe it was impulsive thinking?

Though the concept of racism is old, the experience itself was new for me. Is this what they call "cultural shock"? I questioned myself; "no, it is not a cultural problem." My conscious answered me. In the beginning, I felt like a misfit. It was hard on me, living in a new country without friends, relatives and family was already tough. I used to think what difference skin color makes, it's not even our choice and I'll be the same even if I have white or black skin. I felt sad and lonely but it was a blessing that almost after every semester, I could go back to my home country and now, I was allowed a new way of seeing things. I looked at my people, my society and realized that we are extremely conscious of status: the poor have a different standard of education, schools, shopping malls where only the wealthy loiter, from medicines to food, housing areas, public transport; nearly everything has a very obvious division. Why had I never noticed this? And then I realized, "Oh, I am from a privileged class". I have lived in a bubble my entire life and with blinds drawn over my eyes. Now when faced with something out of my comfort zone, where I had the experience of being an outlier rather than the privileged one, I am feeling uncomfortable and rejected. That was the point when I took off my blinds and saw things I had never seen before. That is called real awareness as Massumi mentioned "You are viscerally exposed, like a prodded sea cucumber that spits its guts. You are exposed down to your inmost sensitive folds. Down to the very peristaltic rhythms that make you what you are" (9). Going home and coming back to Canada had a big impact on my understanding of myself and my biases; there was a spontaneous comparison and I didn't find myself an exception. I enjoyed being privileged and I came to the revelation that I am not all that different from those who are

here in Canada. At least people here talk about the injustices of society. But do we talk? I questioned myself. The realization hit me quite hard.

Displacement turns into placement, and from within the widening distances spaces and gaps, the surface turned into true self-realization. Somewhere, I found a true sense of self and my experiences in new and unfamiliar territory brought me where I had once placed others. I found it hard to understand myself.

Displacement to Placement

*Displacement had destroyed,
My sense of unity and being,
The bonds between mind and body ruptured,
Slowly but deliberately with no warning,
Spaces started emerging in these widening distances,
Roughly pushing me toward an unknown world,
And it was a blessing,
It was necessary for the inner self,
Need to be pushed into this,
Beyond it to attain,
True identification of the self,*
(Raheela)

Leavy said, “Sometimes we need to go at things differently” (1). Those different perspectives enlightened me in a way that these spaces between the distances became a place where I could stop to look at myself in a mirror, as Appelbaum explains in these words “One comes to an end, and the other open. Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity. The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other. It is neither poised nor unpoised, yet moves both ways. It is this space that is the primary subject of my interest. It is the stop” (qtd. in Ricketts 26). It was an entirely different mode of thinking from when I first arrived.

I was at first upset by the idea of living alone in a new land and “I knew again that my life had irrevocably altered” (Ricketts 23). At that time, strangely, there was no real sense of having

left home; what I had collected all these years, family, friends, culture, traditions and land, surely I was enriched by all these connections. And undoubtedly these connections are still strong. As a result of becoming self-aware and realizing myself, I became an open-minded individual who was willing to accept a new culture, language, and tradition. I used to write poetry in my native language but here in Canada, I experimented with new languages as well. There were many new emotional experiences during my stay, new ways of feeling happiness, sadness and excitement.

My stories are connected to my newfangled experiences but at the same time, a simultaneous comparison between cultures and lands has wordlessly taken its place within me. I met many people, made new friends, and was revealed to the knowledge imparted by my intellectual and wonderful teachers. All these hidden and known stories have become part of me. Now, I see this as a positive change. I believe that coming to Canada is a blessing for me; though I was displaced, I have, in a sense, been re-placed and it is this replacement that has fashioned an aesthetic vision of my inner self, a vision that has opened an eye of awareness and directed me towards new horizons.

I experiment to write a poem to express my feelings regarding all prejudices we have in the world.

Prejudices

*Please come out,
Come out of your skin,
Come out of your pride,
Show me your soul,
Let me see who you really are?
The color of skin, it's not even a choice.
The wealth, sect, caste, and nationalism,
Worthless to be proud upon,
It's all up here,
In our heads,
It doesn't exist in reality,
From generation to generation,
We are passing on*

*The same old-fashioned thoughts,
Let's get rid of old trends,
Start something new,
Come forward and Show me your real self,
Your real talent,
Your real achievement,
We humans,
The best creation on this earth,
Come on!
Think big,
Think about humanity,
Love, peace, and harmony,
We can do this
Yes, we still have courage,
We still have time,
Hold the hands,
Make a big circle,
Build a bridge,
Spread the words,
Words of compassion,
Words have power,
A true influence,
There are pure hearts, a reason for hope,
Join the circle and spread the word,
Let's do it united,
Look at the sky,
Above the sea,
The sun is rising,
Open your eyes,
Let's create,*



*A new world,
For upcoming generations,
Without any biasedness, differences hatred, and war
We can do it; we have the power,
We are still here,
Before it's too late
Let's change the world,
Let's do it now,
At this very moment,
By changing your thoughts.*

(Raheela)

A gift of sharing and learning

Coming to a new country was an exciting but a rather tough experience for me. It gave me a true sense of who am I and showed me a new perspective on life. My stories and experiences created a new path for me as a teacher and a student. I experienced a different classroom in Canada's diverse society, where I felt a great sense of sharing and celebrating diversity. I had the privilege to share my stories, poetry and experiences. Honored to receive four awards as a Graduate Teacher Assistant; I enjoyed students' creative writing through their perspectives and experiential learning; a great opportunity of being in the classrooms with my professors, opened new ways of learning and teaching. I always believed that with the gift of knowledge humans are inquisitive about their surroundings and this ability led them to discover, explore and create new worlds. The best part of creativity is to create our unique worlds. Therefore, to enhance this ability, students require an atmosphere where they have the environment to create and build new worlds of their own. When we talk about creativity, we should remember that proper guidance can make things much easier for learners and it could be only possible if teachers and students have strong connections with each other. In the beginning in my classrooms as a student, I felt uncomfortable and hesitant to ask any questions. I failed to understand many important requirements in my first paper, which led to many mistakes in citations, format, and arrangement. It was an honor to study under my amazing professor; he provided me with a lot of research materials as well as shared his own struggles with me. I felt connected and comfortable.

This was the moment when I realized why I had been hesitant to ask? My feelings of being a stranger were exacerbated by the lack of connections I had. As a result of my professor's kind help, I gained a great deal of confidence and my heart was touched. I looked around and realized that I am not the only one, there are many new students and they might be facing the same problems. The optimistic thought crawled into my mind and took all the anxiety and stress away. The support, a teacher provides to his/her students aren't tangible. We are not able to see it with our naked eyes and might not feel the impact of that connection right away especially when the struggling mode is on but believe me it has long-term effects. For me, it was the biggest gift at the most challenging time of my life. It raised me high, brought my confidence back and gave me the best scores, the best scholarship and lots of courage. Don't you think it was the best gift a teacher can ever give to his/her student?

Celebrating diversity through stories and building bridges

No doubt, we are different from each other but these differences bring uniqueness and beauty to this world. In Canada through my experiences, I learned that differences are not to discriminate, but rather to gain more knowledge. Isn't it amazing that we witness the same event but everybody will have a different experience? Our different backgrounds, cultures, food, languages, weather, traditions, skin color, ethnicity, dressing and the way of thinking, these differences are our identities instead of looking down upon them, we should cheer their uniqueness and enjoy being different. These positive thoughts brought confidence and encouraged me to step forward to make new friends by sharing my stories with them. It is true that I have encountered hidden racism in some of my classes and was a victim of it but in my opinion, an optimistic approach that converts pessimistic thinking into creative learning comes from a positive attitude. This method worked well and my positive attitude slowly but gradually turned my new place into a comfortable home for me.

The habit of listening and sharing has helped me become more aware of other cultures, traditions, and practices. It was through stories and discussions during my sessions that I was able to gain a broad understanding of a new country and at the same time can integrate smoothly. My new circle helped me to adapt to the environment, surroundings and new ways of living in minus forty to sixty Celsius in winter. As a result of hearing many stories of students who couldn't handle the cold and left, it gave me the courage and strength to focus and be more

determined rather than give up on my dream. I had enough information to decide whether I want to stay or leave; it helped me plan for the future. Undeniably, it was hard to live alone in a new country far away from family and friends but sharing stories and listening to others brought a comfortable atmosphere and gave me a great sense of belonging. I made friends and learned about their struggles. Now that I see these stories from a different perspective, I believe that they have given me the knowledge and improved my understanding of society. I must admit that in my new home, I was confronted with a lot of cultural differences. I can recall many occasions when I felt stupid and uncomfortable. Some spontaneous jokes happened due to language and cultural differences. In the beginning, I was a stranger not only to the country but almost to everything. Things that were normal in my country were strange to them; the way we joked, dressed, ate, believed, practiced customs, and spoke in my country were all different, yet I discovered many similarities in human nature. I concentrated on the commonalities and became linked, but it took a while for me to adjust. I must emphasize how much I value my customs, beliefs, language, and the way I dress; in fact, having a different accent has never made me feel inferior. At the same time, however, because I understand the importance of learning about differences, I also adore exploring and appreciating new customs, languages, cultures, foods, and ways of life. I embraced it as an edition without abandoning what I had learned since birth. I merged in a way that I felt comfortable and knowledgeable. Somehow, it was a difficult phase, but at the same times a progressive chapter in my life.

I keep track of stories wherever I went. I enjoyed hearing and sharing them. During my long flights, I made many friends. Every narrative was different, and every encounter taught me something new. In my classes, I shared stories, experiences and struggle with my new classmates. It was wonderful to see how curious they were to learn more about my culture and traditions. In addition, I brought my culture into my classroom. I brought my dresses and food plus showed them many videos to introduce them to our music, traditions and culture. I shared my journey my fears and my dreams with them. I also shared narratives of my responsibilities, and different roles that I play as a mother, student, teacher, writer and poet, even though, I was away from my family but still connected. It changed the whole scenario of the classroom. My professors allowed me to share my poetry in my language so they could hear the rhythm and sounds of a different language. It allowed other students to share their experiences, struggles and

stories. This shared knowledge brought a comfortable atmosphere to my classes where we all felt connected.

Connections are important. Once a connection is established, it can create an atmosphere of trust where the teacher and student feel privileged to share their invisible knowledge that can provide more understanding of each other's struggles, problems, backgrounds, and privileges. As a teacher, it's the most important part of my curriculum to provide my students with comfort and make things more comprehensible and informal inside the classroom. I believe that they are all gifted with unique skills and interests, it's their right to explore what they own and they must learn how to bring the best out of their abilities. Sharing my poems and prose brought a different side of my personality and the same for them when they share their stories, experiences and skills, we understand each other better.

Underneath the soil

A Seed

*The water of my tears,
The sadness of my heart,
Turned me into a seed,
Then they said,
A necessary action had to be taken,
Under the ground, I was buried,
The soil was hard,
As I grew, I made it soft,
Deep beneath the earth, pitch black and dark,
Despite the immense pressure,
I was startled but determined,
I pulled myself harder to see the sun,
I was a tiny little plant,
The wind was strong,
I stood firm and confidently,
I fought many battles, quietly and patiently,
The snow, rain, storms, and harsh weather,*

*I defeated them all,
Now look at me,
A tiny little seed,
Grew into a big tree,
Still remembered,
Battles I've fought for survival?
Underneath the soil,
The pain, darkness, and pressure,
It was not forever,
Come sit under my shade and listen to all the stories,
I have to share with you,
It is my hope that these stories of struggle,
Which I have preserved for you,
Will surely, enlighten your soul.*

Raheela

Conclusion

When we tell a story and narrate an event we have our way of perceiving it, it is the beauty of different perception. In spite of my best efforts to be unbiased or non-judgmental as a researcher, I will not say that I am without biases or judgments; it's impossible to ignore them as a human being. This is not a deliberate act, instead, it is how I perceive an event and create my own interpretation of it. I find it interesting to hear about an event from multiple people with different perspectives. I can recognize the impact of different mindsets, moods and the cultural effects. It helps me to understand them better through their narratives; in fact, this is the beauty of storytelling. Throughout the text, stories and experiences are revealed as defining characteristics of each person, and students can learn through sharing the stories and experiences of others.

The paper reveals how this process connects us to the past and links us to our daily characters, allows us to perform multiple roles spontaneously whilst performing tasks, and offers the opportunity to learn through a procedure that is linked directly to one main objective. This extraordinary method of learning connects us as rhizomes are linked beneath the soil, allowing

us to grow individually and remain attached. This study brought a strong sense of connectivity with the roles I play in my daily life and the relationships I build within my classrooms through sharing my stories, poetry, prose and experiences. The paper advocates a curriculum that promotes knowledge builds connections and instills a strong sense of belonging.

I learned and am still in a process of learning through my artistic side as a poet and writer while playing a role of a teacher, mother and wife at the same time. Each role has its own place and time of performance. When I share my different roles and their performances in my classroom, I give them a true sense of my character and it helps to create an environment that teaches students to reveal their real selves, a comfortable space that facilitates true learning and enhances the hidden capabilities of learners. I also believe true learning cannot take place without integrating our connections with culture, tradition, language, faith, society, and previous experiences. In order to learn effectively, it is essential to restore every possible connection.

The resources that we build and preserve for our upcoming generations are valuable and our experiences and stories of the past are a boon for them to learn and benefit from them. It's not just yours, his, hers, or my story and experience, it's a moment that we lived and it provided us with something that can't be found anywhere because my experience is unique as my story and I. We learn from past experiences and preserve them as stories and then these bitter, sweet and sour memories affect upcoming events of our lives. We spontaneously absorb, plan and make decisions under influence of our past experiences. The past, present and future, are all about experiences and stories, interconnected with each other. The journey that started the day when I felt, how important it is to build connections with my students still have a long route to reach the destination and surely, there are many unseen and undiscovered adventures waiting for me. I want to share one of my poems at the end. I shared it in my many classes with my stories, the stories that I preserved through my different roles as a struggling mother, a passionate teacher a hardworking student, a bold storyteller and a sensitive poet.

A courageous foot

I carved my path,

As I walked to follow my dreams

The virgin soil crumbled,

Shouted with joy,

The sun and the moon,
Wished upon that path,
The sky, stars, wind, and aurora,
Danced with pleasure,
It has been years,
They have been waiting,
For a fearless dreamer,
With a courageous heart,
That others can follow.

(Raheela)

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