Greetings from the Centre for Arts-informed Research. We are off to a busy and exciting year of creation and research, with one book hot off the press and two new volumes of the Arts-informed Inquiry Series due within a year. In addition, a new ‘Scholartistry Series’ will be initiated shortly. Stay tuned for news on the upcoming book launch celebrations, and events at the Centre.

We are blessed in this issue of “arts-informed” with a diverse and inspiring collection of scholartistry: projects in progress, essays and artful representations. It is a joy to be a part of this innovative space, and I am grateful to all contributors past and present for sharing their work and treading this road less traveled.

The Centre for Arts-informed Research is located within the Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology at OISE/University of Toronto. We are a community of faculty and graduate students with a shared commitment to exploring, articulating, and supporting ways of bringing together art and social science research. Over the years the Centre has sponsored works-in-progress, discussions, gallery exhibits, performances, seminar talks, and conference presentations. One of our intentions is to provide a context for promoting exciting, innovative, ‘scholartistry’ that forges new shapes of academic discourse. We welcome new ‘scholartists’ to our community. If what we are doing strikes a chord with you and you would like to be involved in some way, contact Ardra Cole: acole@oise.utoronto.ca

Our website is another way of finding out more about The Centre for Arts-informed Research: http://home.oise.utoronto.ca/~aresearch
Edmonton’s Out Is In Project: Reflecting Life and Fostering Resilience through Arts-Based Community Education

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An Overview of the Out Is In Project
Edmonton’s Out Is In project, which is funded by a grant from the Department of Justice Canada’s Community Mobilization Program, began last year in November (2003). It is carried out under the auspices of Agape, a sex, sexual, and gender differences focus group that André and Kris initiated in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. André, an Associate Professor and researcher in inclusive education, focused on queer issues, and Kris, a doctoral student working with André, saw the need for this project emanating from their research into the experiences of queer youth in Edmonton (Grace & Wells, 2001). When funding was received, Kristy, a social and political community activist and Lynn, a graduate student who had already worked on a local anti-racism community education project, worked with André and Kris to initiate an arts-based community education and OUTreach project for queer and allied youth aged 25 and under.

Out Is In provides a safe socializing and learning space where queer and questioning youth positioned across the spectrum of sex, sexual, and gender differences have a place to talk, socialize, organize, learn, create, and just be themselves. In arts-based workshops and projects, participants as young as eleven express what it’s like to address the pervasive silence and taunts around queer issues in their schools. While most youth participants do not consider themselves to be artists or writers, they are enthusiastic learners who find affirmation and support as they explore possibilities for creative forms of expression. The need for peer-to-peer connection helps to create common ground and community. B. R., a grade twelve Catholic high-school student remarked, “I feel like people put me into this file folder by stereotyping me. I want to burst out and show my gay pride. With each day, homophobia lingers in high school and gay and trans youth feel trapped. It feels so good to connect with other people.”

For us, the youth participating in the Out Is In project remind us of the activists in Queer Nation who use the slogan “We’re Here! We’re Queer! We’re Fabulous!” Queer Nation was a direct action group formed in New York City in 1990 by a group of queers determined to fight homophobia and hate crimes against members of the queer community (Hogan & Hudson, 1998). Like these activists, these youth are amazing and fabulous! They’re coming out at younger and younger ages. Many are demanding their rights from principals and teachers in their schools. We love their in-your-face attitudes and their creativity and vibrancy. They are proud young people who are surviving queer, queering survival at home, at school, in churches, and in their communities where they are barraged with heterosexualizing attitudes, beliefs, and ways of doing things. Out Is In exists to help these youth build self-confidence and become resilient. It provides them with an opportunity to speak candidly to the challenges they face, and to identify the resources and sources of support they need to overcome these challenges. The need is great. As J. L., a grade twelve student puts it, “Even though my school is becoming less homophobic, the world isn’t. As an overall issue, homophobia has to be dealt with in the school and in the community.”

This is vital. Homophobia feeds off ignorance and fear and often leads to violence against queer (and perceived to be queer) youth. For these youth, school is perhaps the toughest environment to mediate. There are always risks of physical violence coupled with daily encounters with symbolic violence that include anti-queer slurs, hateful graffiti scrawled on their lockers, and the silence of teachers who ignore words like “fag” and “dyke” while the racial slur “nigger” would send them into a tailspin. To deal with this exclusion and abrasion, youth in the Out Is In project use artistic forms of expression to deal with their everyday experiences and feelings as they
respond, resist, and survive in the face of heteronormativity and homophobia. They also use their creations to profile themselves and stimulate dialogue about their needs and issues in relation to sex, sexual, and gender differences. As well, they use arts-based activities as ways to educate others, have an impact on school and society, and build community awareness and supports. In summary, Out Is In involves:

- using a by-youth-for-youth approach to develop an arts-based education program—students create poetry and narrative vignettes, cartoons, paintings, collage work, photographic displays, role plays, improvisations, etc.—that enables youth to explore self, others, familial contexts, the educational environment, and other parts of their community that affect them.
- using a by-youth-for-youth approach to develop youth-OUTreach activities focused on supporting self-development and interpersonal relationships and preventing problems with authorities.
- holding interactive group workshops, seminars, and conferences to profile youth achievements by giving them a space to present their artistic work and engage others, increase public awareness, and discuss strategies for setting up Gay-Straight Student Alliances (GSAs) for queer and questioning students in schools.
- developing resource materials for queer and questioning youth and community-group stakeholders who want to learn how to engage, support, and work with them.

How Out Is In Works: On With the Show

Out Is In hosts youth activities once or twice a week. A key emphasis is the development of socialization and leadership skills through programs that emphasize identity exploration and arts-based activities. For example, a Valentine-making party involved creating and decorating a card for a loved one. This simple activity provided participants an opportunity to be acknowledged as loving, romantic, and caring individuals who may be involved in same-sex relationships. Moreover, peers provided informal support, advice, and encouragement for other youth participants struggling with issues related to relationships, loneliness, and coming out to family members and friends. In another activity, youth attended a movie night at the University of Alberta where they watched a series of films created and produced by queer youth in Toronto. This provided Out Is In youth an opportunity to explore issues of identity and socialization in a larger Canadian context. They discussed the films enthusiastically during and after the event, which engaged them in cultural learning about self and others in diverse contexts. This film night and other Out Is In events also brought many youth into a university setting for the first time, helping to show them that the university wasn’t such a scary place or a part of some distant dream that they could never achieve.

When an activity is long-term, youth participants create schedules and designate their own tasks as they work to accomplish their objectives. For example, during winter 2004, youth in the Out Is In program carried out activities in relation to The Ideal School Project. Here youth brainstormed, designed, and constructed a diorama of an ideal school, a place where queer and questioning youth would feel accepted, accommodated, valued, and safe. During this activity youth learned to delegate tasks, negotiate ideas, communicate effectively, and cooperate as a group. The activity led to a broader engagement in human diversity studies. For example, youth wanted school cafeterias to offer foods that met the dietary and religious needs of students. They also wanted a curriculum that encouraged girls to take “shop” and boys to learn sewing. Through their participation youth learned about supportive listening. They shared personal stories and feelings, built rapport and trust with peers, and learned leadership skills as they worked in a group environment.
The goal of The Ideal School Project was to create an art installation display for the “Embracing Spirituality, Embracing Sexuality” conference, which was hosted by the Diversity Conferences of Alberta Society in early spring 2004. The locker installation that resulted became the Out Is In project’s first collective art piece. Using fourteen old school lockers donated by a local junior high school, youth participants transformed the lockers with paintings, collage work, tapestries, and other art forms as they provided information and insights about themselves, straight and queer peers, and homophobia in school settings. For example, the locker door of one participant displayed the label “freak” to refer to the world’s labeling of his outer queer self, while the locker’s inner compartment contained paintings and images of the serenity felt by his inner queer self. In sum, the locker installation became a symbolic way to talk about youth and an ideal school, one that would deal seriously with homophobia in schools as social spaces.

During summer 2004 youth participated in the SASSY (Summer Arts Studios Supporting Youth) program, which involved the exploration of several art media on a weekly basis. Out Is In secures venues for youth participants to present work created through involvement in such projects. For example, youth presented their work at a year-end gallery show at the Edmonton Public Library in June 2004 as part of Edmonton’s Pride Week celebrations. The two-day show was entitled We Have Come This Far: An Art Show about Youth and Society. Using the locker installation, dioramas of the ideal safe-and-caring school, photographic displays, and other artwork, youth exposed their identities, vulnerabilities, and resilience. Collectively, they also made a cultural and political statement, using their creations to critique schooling and exclusionary curricula and instruction. To involve audience members, youth encouraged their participation in a Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve activity. Patches about diversity made by junior high and elementary students were displayed, and interactive craft stations were set up to enable visitors to create their own patches.

Youth were excited to have their show profiled on the front page of the City section of the Edmonton Journal. Over 300 guests attended, including some of the participants’ families and friends. Out Is In held a reception for 100 guests and speakers. This reception was designed to celebrate just how far the queer youth in the Out Is In project had come! At this celebration representatives from the University of Alberta and Edmonton City Council gave speeches encouraging the youth and adults in attendance to remain courageous and resilient leaders advocating for social change. Many who attended the show and closing reception affirmed the youth artists and their inspiring work through comments such as these:
• As a pretty new mom of a wonderful little boy, I’m so moved – and relieved – that queer youth are finding their voices, and I’m incredibly proud of how much insight and truth those voices share.
• I think it’s really sad that people get boxed in and pressured to conform. Very thought provoking. I can only imagine the horror of having to go, day after day, to a place where you feel frightened, alienated, and brutalized by the attitudes of others. Schools have too often been unfriendly to those who are different, and teachers have too often ignored the struggles of kids who don’t fit in. All teachers need to take a bold stand against bullying and intolerance, rather than turning a blind eye and deaf ear.
• I am sooo jealous of what you have done and how far you have come. You deserve safe spaces and to be heard. I’m proud of your courage to fight for these things. Lead the way.

References

Note
The coordinating team for the project and writers of this article can be contacted at outisin@ualberta.ca. For more information, please visit www.ualberta.ca/~outisin.
“Telling Salmon Tales” is a collaborative arts-informed research project that explores the intersections of salmon and human lives. It is a participatory project in that it engages participants or readers by asking them to share their salmon stories. The three primary researchers are Lee Bensted, Jacinda Mack, and Aileen Penner. We were primarily motivated by a shared history of wild salmon and concerns over the destructive practice of salmon farming on BC’s coasts. With strong roots in B.C., we came together in a graduate class to co-create an installation for York’s Eco-Art and Media Festival in 2004. However, the installation has been anything but static since it first went up.

This eco-art inquiry attempts to establish counter-hegemonic narratives with respect to the way we understand salmon and salmon-human relationships through a visual arts’ experiment. Through the process of silk-screening and textile art we hoped to challenge our commonsensical ideas and see salmon in a radically different way. As Butler-Kisber (2002) argues, “form mediates understanding” and by using arts-based methods we hoped to evoke emotions that tend to be excluded from “objective” studies. We wanted to provoke the imagination and conjure new possibilities.

The installation “Telling Salmon Tales” is made up of four banners. “Colonization of the Salmon People” (Jacinda Mack); “Crossing (disciplinary) Boundaries” (Aileen Penner); “Regeneration Stories” (Lee Bensted); and a fourth collaborative banner, “Re-Telling: Weaving Many Truths.” The three individual banners hang together to form the main piece, opposite which the fourth banner is installed.
Colonization of the Salmon People

Personal and political, the “Colonization of the Salmon People” banner speaks to the ongoing struggles Aboriginal people face in an imposed existence, particularly those of the Nuxalk Nation on the Northwest Coast. Self-described as the Salmon People, the Nuxalk maintain that their connection to salmon goes beyond sustenance. It carries significant cultural, spiritual and social importance in their understanding of the world and their place in it. In addition, the Salmon People are storied beings of the rivers and oceans, who now face similar experiences of sickness and devastation, and the displacement and colonization of their natural world. The banner speaks to the interconnectedness of the worlds above and below water, making no distinction between nation and storied beings.

The banner is in the form of a totem pole, a witness who bears the burden of history while embracing the responsibilities of knowledge bestowed. The backdrop of the banner signifies the harsh realities of sickness, grief and loss in the gray “blanket of colonization”, similar to those used in residential schools and by early traders. It is covered in splattered red paint, the blood of past and present Salmon People. At the top of the pole is the sun, on whose eyelashes the first Nuxalk slid to the earth in the cloaks of their clan animals. Within the life-giving sun is the cedar tree, whose roots nestle salmon eggs in the spawning beds of rivers. Beneath the sun is the Grizzly Bear, representing Jacinda’s family and her own duties to protect what it means to be a Nuxalk citizen.

The salmon within the bear also acknowledges the importance of salmon to other beings and life systems. Interrupting the story is a farmed salmon pen, hostile and toxic, warning us of the dangers of breeding a sick and soul-less being. The final image of a potlatch copper signifies wealth. The copper supports the totem, with salmon being the wealth of the Nuxalk, nourishing bodies and enabling trade with neighbour nations. Potlatch coppers only increase in value when they are given away or re-generated, contradicting dollar-value-only in consumer, capitalist society. Finally, the human hand with the bear paw inside signifies Jacinda’s personal struggle and commitment to protecting what it means to be one of the Salmon People.

Although much of the banner tells a raw truth, it is hopeful, shining its copper light on issues that affect us all, and for which we are all responsible.

Crossing (disciplinary) Boundaries

“Crossing (disciplinary) Boundaries” focuses on the relationship between humans, nature and technoscience in the salmon farming debate. This banner highlights the notion that in order for humans to treat salmon as machines, a profound disconnection must take place in discourse, viewing these storied beings as a global commodity. The banner relates to the role of science in salmon research as well as the multiple disciplines involved in any research into salmon. Aileen chose two central images: a “machine” salmon and hand-made ladders connecting a fragmented sockeye salmon.

The mechanical salmon image is a story that once let loose in the world, is dangerous because it often claims to be the Truth. This reductionist scientific salmon story takes knowledge of the part and extends and universalizes it to the whole. This story then pretends to be the whole, and to be disconnected from power and politics. The green machine salmon represents farmed, factory fish. When we go to buy salmon in a store, we can’t tell the process it went through to get to the shelf. This image highlights that process.

The image of ladders is two-fold. First, humans have to construct fish ladders to help spawn salmon up rivers because of dams and other barriers. Second, the ladder metaphor helps think about salmon across disciplines. Salmon conservation tends to be discipline-specific. Scientists and resource managers talk to one another, but rarely speak about the social: social sciences, social relations, ethics, environmental politics, etc. Aileen was deeply interested in the ladders she has had to build in order to speak across difference. She made the ladders from the same raw red silk as the salmon, and twisted and knotted them to give a textured look and feel that reflects their hand-made, flimsy, experimental, and contingent qualities. She was also conscious of the fact that the language she chose (i.e. visual art) often has to struggle for recognition in the fields of biology, ecology, etc.
Regeneration Stories
Indian feminist, scientist, and activist Vandana Shiva (1997) describes regeneration as a philosophy of life that honours the self-organizing and self-reproducing capacities of all life forms. Without regeneration, she reminds us, there can be no sustainability. The third banner, “Regeneration Stories” tells a story that revalues and respects the processes of regeneration in and among humans and the “more than human.” It was inspired by Lee’s own experiences of salmon, closely tied to her father and his death from cancer in 1998. During the last few months of his life, Lee’s dad had chosen wild salmon to accompany him, metaphorically, in his upstream journey against cancer. He visualized wild salmon swimming through his body, gobbling up every cancerous cell in sight. In the end the salmon consumed him too, and like them, his bones and body were returned to the river and ocean waters off the BC coast. Several years later, Lee came to understand this transformation into a salmon as a profoundly spiritual and political act. It stood as a counter story to the Western reductionist, or machine-view of the world (and salmon) that prioritizes the independence and not the interdependence of living systems.

In Lee’s banner soft-sculpture tree roots transform into human arteries and veins, depicting the intimate interconnections between humans and the environment. Water is the life-blood that nurtures us at birth, flows through our bodies, the forests, air, rivers, oceans, and through the salmon. Air bubbles silk-screened with the biohazard symbol inside suggest all is not well in this ecosystem. Toxins, cancers, and other chemicals threaten the health of our internal and surrounding environment. The central image, an adult salmon curled protectively around a human fetus suggests that salmon are also our protectors.

Re-Telling: Weaving Many Truths
Recognizing the partiality of all stories, and that there is never one grand narrative, we wanted to piece together the salmon stories. The fourth banner is a woven tapestry of cloth, ideas, stories and words—a radical re-telling of commonsense ideas about salmon. For the weave, we chose pieces of fabric used in making our individual banners. We wanted the re-telling to act as a collage of materials, ideas, and stories. The cedar mat weave was inspired by Jacinda’s story of the Nuxalk tradition of taking the first salmon that comes up the river and placing it on woven cedar prepared by women in the community and offered as a gift. The salmon offer themselves as gifts to humans, with the understanding that people must return the offering with a ceremony to ensure the return of salmon year after year.

The banner is placed to allow participants to read the artists’ statements (at eye level) and attach their own salmon stories to the banner. Many stories emerged (and continue to emerge) as part of the interactive nature of the fourth banner. Most notably are, “How I became an anti-capitalist: my one-man strike against the salmon processing industry,” a photo story of a First Nations’ salmon BBQ, and a re-telling of a chiropractor who accepted salmon (the only currency available) in exchange for his services. All are examples of the layered experiences and relationships we have with salmon and each other.

Telling Salmon Tales: Nomadic Research
The “Telling Salmon Tales” project was exhibited at the OISE/UT Student Research Conference in March 2004, as well as at the Spirit Matters: Wisdom Traditions and the “Great Work” conference at OISE/UT in May 2004. Since that time, we have received requests to be part of food, environmental justice, and local community festivals. In June 2004 the project went on the road to New York for the From Agriculture to Culture: The Social Transformation of Food conference of the Culinary Institute of America, the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS), and the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society (AFHVS). Most recently, our proposal to exhibit “Telling Salmon Tales” in the North Vancouver CityScape Community Art Space (July 15 to September 18, 2005) was accepted, and we are already busy creating, fundraising, and organizing. By any measure, the project has not remained static, and we hope it never will. “Telling Salmon Tales” grows and changes and is new every time we install it in a new space. One of its greatest strengths is the layered understanding that occurs through interaction with the project and the people who contribute to it. Discussions, ideas, interpretations and stories about salmon continue to emerge, engaging people to think about salmon as more than protein or profit.
The fourth-banner in particular, speaks to the power of collaboration and collective voice so necessary in activism. Our hope is that the project can serve to inspire others to take up arts-based practices and other non-traditional forms of research and education.

References
Chords and Melodies: An Inquiry into the Power of the Art Forms of Story and Music on Teller, Performer and Listener.

Ariella Rachel Damelin, Ph.D.

Introduction
This arts-based-narrative inquiry is a continuation of my doctoral inquiry Walking Barefoot: A Storyteller’s Arts-based Inquiry into the power of the art forms of story and music on teller, performer, and listener, and is part of my life-long journey. It is an expansion of my consciousness about relationships, notions of research and education. In this inquiry I become aware of my co-researcher, Maria, single mother of a brain injured son – Luke, myself, our relationship and the processes that emerge from our collaborative experience. The inquiry is about a sense of place for us. Perhaps within it, we uncover an alternative learning response to standardization – a human, aesthetic and relational response.


Piece 1: Positioning
My inquiry (what it is and how it is produced) is grounded in arts-based-narrative theories and practices of teaching and learning. I am the central instrument of inquiry, and regard my research settings as “complex interacting set[s] of living relationships” (Eisner, 1998, p. 213). I focus on developing “personal and professional qualities of relationality, mutuality and empathy, care, sensitivity and respect” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 45). Relationships form the spine of my story. I use words spoken and written by my co-researchers. However, I recognize that the work that emerges does not reveal anyone or any experience completely. In the end, it is my voice that dominates, and Luke’s silence reverberates.

Piece 2: A Concert:
This story began as a journal entry in response to a piano recital given by Luke and his music teacher, Adam, my eldest son, to a group of elementary school students.

Journal Entry, February 3, 2003
The Wheeltrans cab pulls up outside the school. As there is no wheelchair access, Luke is carried up the entrance stairs in his chair. His mother Maria and his assistant Grace follow behind. Luke’s neatly combed brown hair leaves the scar from his brain surgery exposed. When I approach he adjusts his glasses, puts out his hand, and shakes it firmly. “Hello,” he mouths in response to my greeting. While the children enter the room with their teachers, I help Maria display photographs of Luke on a long narrow table at the front of the room, photographs of him as an honours’ student, basketball and football player, and also lying hooked up to intravenous bags in a hospital bed. Adam sets up the synthesizer, speaker, stool, and video camera. He wheels Luke behind the instrument, and sits down beside him. I move to the back of the room. The school principal welcomes everyone, and calls on Maria to introduce Luke. Maria places one hand on Luke’s shoulder, and begins.

Good morning. My name is Maria and Luke is my son. Thanks so much, for organizing this concert. We hope you will enjoy it.
I would like to tell you a little bit about Luke so you will better relate to him. Luke was a normal kid. He was an excellent student at St. Mark’s College, each year on the honour roll.
Everything changed on May 31, 1994. He was hit by a truck while crossing the road. His arms and leg were broken and he suffered a severe brain injury. After five months, when he was ready to be discharged from the hospital, the doctors declared Luke a vegetable, and suggested that I put him in an institution. Of course, as his mother, I could not accept this. Luke was 16 years old.
After a very hard struggle, Luke was sent to the US to a special place of rehabilitation. And it was there that Luke started to recognize us, smile, eat, dress,
shower, go to the swimming pool, and even walk assisted. We stayed there for almost a year.

When we came back to Toronto, Luke started intensive therapy. In 2000, he completed Grade 12, graduating on the honour roll. Now, Luke enjoys listening to music, playing the piano, making CD’s, appearing on TV, company, going to movies, eating in restaurants, and playing games. He has a good sense of humour and always has a smile to offer. Last year, we even managed to take a trip to Italy, where Luke enjoyed a real cappuccino.

What can I tell you from this story? I learned that we should never give up, never be discouraged. There is always hope. Just believe in it, and you will see remarkable changes. Be sensitive. Also, I learned not to take anything for granted, and not everything is in your control. Life is full of surprises, but we have to turn our eyes in different directions and see possibilities.

Adam is a miracle for us. He has musical talent, a special gift. Food and love keep us alive, but music is also a necessity for Luke. It is an identity for him. With it, he can set goals for himself.

Thank you for being so patient. Now Adam will say something.

Adam wipes his eyes and begins.

Do you remember a year ago I came into this room and read you the story I wrote called “Symphony in the Attic” about a boy named Naresh who believed in the power of music, and wanted to restore sound to his village? Well, today, Luke will illustrate that power to you.


Luke loves learning, but it is hard for him. Progress is slow. He feels limited, incapable and lost at times, but he works hard, and his successes guide him. I offer him a sense of possibility. Luke has made progress in long and short-term memory, comprehension, communication, and understanding. And something else is happening. Music is becoming not only a vehicle for rehabilitation, but an identity for Luke. He has become a musician.

Luke, are you ready?

Adam places Luke’s hands on the keyboard and his own on the notes close by. He plays the chords, and Luke the melody. A metaphor, perhaps? We all need someone to play the chords for us while we play the melody. They begin with a song by Enrique Eglesias. The children smile and join in. For the next piece, they have chosen “Für Elise”, a tune the children recognize. Adam constantly adjusts his playing to complement and star Luke’s. They play Mozart, Ragtime, Herbie Hancock’s “Water Melon Man,” and end with the Beatles’ "Let it be." It’s over, and, they receive a standing ovation.

After Adam and Maria answer questions, the children leave for recess. I go over to compliment and congratulate Maria and Luke. Maria says, ”I have so many stories to tell.” I offer to help.

The taxi returns. Luke, Maria and Grace leave. As I walk towards the subway station, I wonder: What did this experience mean to the school children, teachers, Maria and Luke? How did they understand and construct meaning from it? Did it become a learning experience that they were able to intermesh with their own, and create a new story which they would tell? And what of Maria? How might the process of telling her life story be educational, transformative and developmental?

Piece 3: A Conversation
I feel excited today as I pack my brief case with my tape recorder, tapes, clipboard and paper. I am an inquirer once more.

I begin by asking Maria to share her vision of our working together. Beside her stands a white paper carrier. She ruffles through papers, cards, photographs, and other memorabilia, and pulls out a plain sheet, with her writing on it. She tells me she would like to write a book about her life and Luke’s life story be educational, transformative and developmental?

I thought I should give an introduction with the purpose and meaning of the book. Then I want to tell something about myself: where I come from, my culture, childhood in Italy, leaving my family, and coming to Canada. I will write about meeting my ex-husband, Luke’s birth, and working two jobs to be able to give him a good education.
Then I will talk about the accident, and how my dreams were swept away like the wind sweeps away the leaves during the fall season, how I thought my heart would break because of the severe pain inside me.

At the end of the book, I will explain that Luke’s improvements are slow. We need patience, energy, and courage. Perhaps music is what Luke will choose, and he will be happy.

In the book, I would like to educate and guide parents of children with disabilities, show therapists and doctors what it is like to be the parent of a brain injured child so they might treat us with kindness, and make readers more sensitive.

As I leave the apartment, I wonder: What was going on in Luke’s room all this time? How does he get out of bed, shower, dress? Does Grace have to do all of this for him? How does Luke feel about Grace having to help him?

Piece 4: Choreography
Journal Entry, June 8, 2003

Maria reads out loud from her recent writing.

When I arrived in Toronto, I made friends, went around freely, communicating in my newly learned English, exploring new horizons.

Her reading is accompanied by the sound of a familiar tune from a musical, and Luke’s and Kim’s laughter.

After a while, Kim announces that she is leaving. Grace arrives, and sits with Luke as he continues to practice. His playing falters momentarily without Kim at his side. The tone of Maria’s voice changes as she reads on.

I married in 1974, and then got a real taste of what life was about. I see that marriage is like a watermelon. You do not know what it is like inside until you cut it.

Luke’s playing grows louder and more flowing the more he practices. His joy seems to match his mother’s as she describes his birth and early childhood.

When Luke was born, my life was fulfilled. Motherhood captured me totally. I remember my first years with Luke like now. Every day, I watched him grow into a strong, healthy boy. While I worked, I always found time to call the daycare to ask how he was doing. When I picked him up, I can still see how he ran up to hug me, “Mommy! Mommy!” What an extraordinary feeling that was. Those moments are kept alive inside me and keep me going. They are the moments of yesterday that I need to remember today.

The music has stopped. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Grace wheeling the walker to Luke waiting beside us. I hear him sigh and breathe deeply as he pulls himself up from his wheelchair into a standing position. Sweat trickles down the scar on his forehead. Maria says the date: “May 31, 1994, 3:00 PM. The tragedy, the awful thing that hit my family.”

Luke starts to walk across the room.

Piece 5: The Truth
And so I come to the end of the collection of my pieces. What is it for? Who will read it, and why?
In her novel The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy (1999) asks: Must we follow the rules that dictate whom we can care for, and how, and how much?

According to Cole and Knowles, (2001), the “truth” of an inquiry lies in its “persuasive, aesthetic, self-reflective and authentic qualities.” Perhaps by telling the story of Maria, Luke and me, a reader might recognize the power of story and music, and become aware that caring and care giving are needed to educate and live.

References
Shifts: Performing Research in the Academy

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It feels different this time. Light sifts faintly in through the windows. The room feels drafty. A group of people—many of them strangers—are sitting facing me in dim light as I prepare to speak.

It is the OISE/UT Student Research Conference and two student colleagues and I have created an interwoven presentation and exhibit of arts-informed works-in-progress. Entitled *Shifting Boundaries: Communicating Care at Home and in the Academy*, our presentation features exploratory projects we developed in our Alternative Methods of Researching Aging, Illness and Health class during fall 2003 (OISE/UT, AEC 1131H). In the spirit of our particular focus on shifting boundaries, we have transformed the classroom with comfortable chairs, rugs, wall hangings, window coverings, and a plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies.

Hand-printed pages of Jessica Levy’s books about her experience of her grandmothers hang on a clothesline and on the walls. Julia Brackenbury’s photo slides and a recording of her interviews with her mother and grandmother, are poised to be presented in one corner of the room. I sit at a desk intricately arranged with large tape recorders, an alarm clock, and a metronome. Three candles are lined up in front of me.

The first and only other time I presented this piece was in a small, windowless room at OISE. When I had entered that room in September 2003, I disliked the airless tightness of it. But by the time of the presentation in December 2003, the room felt intimate and I appreciated the closeness of the four walls. This conference room seems so large and the audience feels far away. Who are they anyway? What are they expecting? Will this piece be comprehensible to them?

Now we are in a conference room filled with a collection of people who have no established group relationship, many of whom I don’t know. They sit in the midst of a transformed space, some of them eating cookies, waiting. I breathe in all these thoughts as I begin.

I quickly confront a minor disaster. As I reach across to turn on one of the tape recorders, my hair touches the flame of one of the candles. “Watch out!” I hear from the audience as one member bounds up to save me. Yikes. I have almost caught fire in my first public presentation of arts-informed research. It seems both embarrassing and fitting. I have a desperate urge to giggle, to make a joke, and give people a chance to laugh, but the performance is already in progress and I try to return to the trance-like quality of the piece.

I created the piece in an attempt to evoke the experience of living with the daily presence of my father’s stroke-induced dementia and sadness. The piece emerged from fieldwork done in my family home. I was seeking a way of conveying aspects of living in the midst of the suffering and isolation. The piece takes place in the dark, illuminated by candles. Composed of three sections, it is a combination of jazz music, live and recorded narratives of my experience spoken in my voice and a poem punctuated by assorted sounds.

Sitting at my kitchen table four months before, I had crafted the piece. I started from my awareness of and interest in the role of music and rhythm in my father’s experience, the way he himself connects music with his ability to stay alive. In addition to the constant music playing in my parents’ home, silence, breathing, the cadence of voices, and the unspoken were important facets of our lived experience. I wanted to explore and, in some way, centre those dimensions of our lives beneath the spoken narrative.

I found myself mulling over the project as I woke up in the mornings and when I went to sleep at night. In these receptive sessions of pondering, idea-image-sounds came and went. I was drawn to the idea of a sound collage, using sounds in addition to the jazz recordings and my voice. I came upon the idea of using a metronome and an alarm clock. It was through the idea of these sounds that I realized that I was working with the concept of “keeping time” and how it is kept: in the context of my father’s experience with dementia and depression and my own struggle to “keep time” in my relationship with my father.
I struggled to balance the focus on evoking an atmosphere, a state of mind in a non-verbal way, with the spoken narrative I wanted to share. As I worked to represent the non-verbal realm of experience, the questions that the project raises started to come to the surface in verbal form: What is home? How do we make home? How is keeping time both sustaining and relentless in the face of fear and suffering? What different kinds of time are there? How are patterns of coping as well as underlying fears shared and passed down in family relationships?

The title of the project occurred to me: *Making Home, Keeping Time*. I had been reading Bernice Johnson Reagon’s (1990) description of the importance of “home” in doing community organizing, drawing on models from the Black church and from the civil rights movement: “It is important to have a safety zone to refuel where you can eat your dinner with others who will understand and will protect your need to be vulnerable” (p. 7). In addition, I was influenced by Maura McIntyre’s (2004) exploration of creating home in the context of a nursing home. I kept returning to this concept of home and the question of how we create this place of sustenance for ourselves, especially in the context of illness and suffering in the home itself.

As I went about my daily tasks, I played with these words: making home, keeping time. I found them echoing and wrapping around each other in my head, repeating, and drumming out their own beat. Their patterned rhythmic twisting and turning seemed to have its own story to tell. In contemplating the form of the piece, I became aware of my own and my family’s ambiguous relationship with words. My father was always a storyteller. I grew up listening to vivid depictions of his boyhood days in his small hometown in Western New York. But words were never my mother’s primary language of expression. In struggling for a representational form of the home co-created by my mother, my father, and myself, I became conscious of the juxtaposition of the intimacy and power of stories with the way words are superseded by more important, non-verbal aspects of experience. I sensed that the project of representing “making home” for the three of us needed to be centred around the marriage and tension of music, silence, and word-stories in their various, distinct incarnations.

I drew on fragments of field notes that became a recorded narrative, musical selections that suited the narrative and evoked the appropriate mood, the sounds of the metronome and alarm clock, the contrast of my live voice to my recorded voice, my own sing-song sequence of word questions. I rehearsed the piece, with one ear serving as audience member, tracking my own emotional shifts and responses as I listened. I was conscious of what patterns and sequences of sound evoked the particular emotional landscape I wanted to represent. I rehearsed the piece over and over with a performer’s consciousness of the importance of timing and transitions.

This process of creating the piece was powerfully situated in a context: the transitory “home” of an intimate arts-informed research seminar. On some level, it was the support, the ongoing discussions, the models presented and the relationships developed in that class that allowed me to do my research, and to grapple with the topic of my family home and my father’s illness. The first time I performed the piece, I had shared a term of inquiry and companionship with my audience members and they knew some of the story behind the development of the piece. They were in my consciousness through the piece’s inception.

I finish, blowing out the last of the candles. Jess turns on a dim lamp at the other side of the room and invites everyone to have tea and cookies and to move through the room. I feel the audience tentative as they begin to rise and explore the room. There is a sense of something unfinished, unsettled in the air. Yet after the piece is over, people come up to me, sit beside me. They share stories of aging and ill parents, of coping with loss in their families. We talk about their experiences, my experience, and their reactions to the piece.

I observe the way the space feels different than most other conference rooms in which I’ve been. Most people mill around the room, listening, touching, reading. The lights are kept low. Jess, Julia and I have planned a gradual transition from the performance of my piece into the exploration of the other exhibits and then eventually into a reflection circle. This allows time for silence, individual reflections, and small group discussions. After about twenty minutes, we form a circle with our audience to discuss and reflect about the works. It is in this circle...
that there is a sense of coming together, of settling in with each other and with the complex emotions and ideas raised by the exhibit/performance. It is in the circle that the laughter begins.

Context is a vital part of how we understand, receive information and produce knowledge. The invitation of arts-informed and other forms of alternative research is to challenge the traditional research context, format, and modes of engagement: to recontextualize our research endeavors physically, intellectually, and emotionally (Cole, 2004). In our conference presentation, Julia, Jess and I sought to create a different quality of engagement through the transformation of space, through our facilitation of the group experience, and through the arts-informed representation of our research.

Yet both times I have performed my piece, I have been struck by my own sense of vulnerability afterwards. Each time, I found myself struggling to straddle the roles of performer and researcher, of emotionally engaged participant and rational presenter. I resonated with Gray and Sinding (2002) who in discussing their own experience of their early performances of arts-informed research about metastatic breast cancer write: “...it was sometimes several minutes into audience questions before we started to breathe normally.” (p. 88)

Just as our presentation Shifting Boundaries explored the concept of family silences and the boundaries we set in families in the name of protection, the presentation also raised questions about the implications of shifting boundaries in the academy to include our bodies and our emotions. How do we create spaces that make room for the potential emotional intensity and vulnerability evoked by research that reconfigures these traditional academic constructs? How do we also make room to acknowledge any potential dangers and costs of breaking down these familiar ways of being and making order? I know in my continuing work on Making Home, Keeping Time, and in my research in general, these questions will continue to resound with me, edging my consciousness like the persistent jazz music in my parents’ home.

References
Representing Home in the Academy  

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I write below about two books of my grandmothers. One is in the form of a child’s book, such as you might have made in elementary school. The other is a crossword puzzle book that has been filled in with a story rather than with the answers the puzzles call for. I presented these in December 2003 in a course at OISE/UT called “Arts-Informed Approaches to Researching Aging, Illness, and Health” (OISE/UT, AEC 1131H). Subsequently, I presented the books in a somewhat different form—the child’s book stapled to the wall as in a classroom display and the crossword puzzle book pages hung up on a clothesline—at the OISE/UT 2004 Student Research Conference as part of an arts-informed research symposium, entitled “Shifting Boundaries: Communicating Care at Home and in the Academy”. The symposium was a collaboration with two other OISE/UT graduate students, Lena Richardson and Julia Brackenbury, who each made their own unique contributions to the theme.

Moving to Toronto to return to school was yet another move that placed me out of close proximity to my family. In making the transition, I decided to take some time to visit my aging family members and do some family history research. My dad’s mom (Grandma L.) had died several years ago after a long existence with Alzheimer’s, and most of her stories were lost. Ironically, she had been the one to do most of the work on the family history on my dad’s side. My mom’s parents, who are still living, have little documentation of their family’s stories. At the very least, I wanted to add more depth to the names, dates and places that we did have on record before anyone got any older.

It hadn’t entered my mind that the project I undertook might later become the subject of a class project and a research conference symposium on arts-informed research. But looking back on the approach I took to the interviews, I see that it fits well within what Lorri Neilsen (1998) describes as the “academy of the kitchen table.” In this form of inquiry, the researcher includes herself in the subject of inquiry and creates a space for “the many issues, circumstances, and challenges of the ordinary which reveal the politics of our behaviour in all our conflicting identities.” (p.143) And, indeed, it was sitting around the kitchen table in my grandparents’ home that I tried to make a space for my grandmother (Grandma W.) to share her stories with me.

I knew that there were silences in our family, as in any family history, and I wanted to find some clues that would reveal what these silences meant, and why we hold on to them. Having lost many of Grandma L.’s stories when she died, I felt the impulse to know and understand Grandma W.’s life even more strongly. Asking questions was a way to find out what answers would emerge and where the silences would remain. More than anything, I wanted to build a stronger bond with my grandmother, and reflect the value her stories hold for me back to her.

When I arrived in Toronto in late August 2003, the stories I’d gathered from my grandmother had already been taken out of their lived context and stored away in digital form. I hadn’t listened to them since they’d been recorded. But suddenly I had a school assignment to explore alternative methods of research in the area of aging, illness, and health. Arts-informed research opened up the possibility of identifying research possibilities closer to home. Describing research projects undertaken with this approach, Neilsen (1998) says, “In each of these cases, the people involved had already begun their inquiry informally: the question, whether they had articulated it to themselves or not, was a part of their life.” (p. 146)

I couldn’t miss the opportunity to take advantage of the space created in this class to pursue a research question that was a part of my life. Family – representing home to me – seemed the most logical focus for my work. Yet, I was so geographically distant from them. And I was in a new context, so distant from the context of their everyday lives. What happens to questions of personal concern when they are brought into the academy and framed in research? What happens when a story told at a kitchen table, recorded and saved on a computer, becomes the raw material for academic work that may even be used to advance a career or make the grade? How would bringing her and our words from her home into a context valuing independent research and personal
advancement, shape my view of my summer conversations with Grandma W.?

To honor Grandma L. and her lost stories, to honor Grandma W. and her current stories (told and untold), and to represent my frustrations with limited knowledge and family silences seemed a goal I could bring to a research project in an academic setting without compromising myself or my family in the process. I can’t write a book about my grandmothers. I don’t have enough information from them or about the facts of their lives. So, instead I wrote a book of my grandmothers, a textual representation where their stories could live and continue to pose questions; a representation that captured me in my attempt to understand the meaning of family silences.

The form of a child’s book, the type of creation many people have brought home from school as children, gave me a chance to reveal myself as researcher through my own handwriting. Through my childlike writing, I portrayed the image of innocence I often feel myself assuming in interactions with Grandma W. By writing the kinds of things children usually report on in such books, I tried to capture the feeling that my knowledge of Grandma W. is scarce and hardly goes beyond the factual. This form portrays the intersection of our lives – my writing and Grandma W.’s story which becomes a part of my own. Since the audience I imagined in the academy does not know either of us well, the familiar form provides a context for familiarity – something that can resonate with many people and invite touch, comfort, easy reading and hopefully, easy relating.

For Grandma L., I had anticipated creating a similar product, incorporating pieces of sheet music and crossword puzzle book pages along with text, to represent her. However, when I picked up a crossword puzzle book at Honest Ed’s, I realized that this was the form that would give her the most context, and would best represent my relationship to her as well. I would write Grandma into the puzzle. I wrote her story in pencil, in my own handwriting as someone trying to solve a puzzle, emphasizing the tenuousness of my knowledge. Again, I hoped this kind of book would be a familiar object for many people – something they would feel comfortable picking up and looking at.

Finding a familiar vehicle with which to contextualize my grandmothers and my relationship with them was not my only goal. The reason for bringing stories of their lives and of our relationships forward was to provoke questions of silences in families – what silences protect and what they don’t, what expectations they hold, how they come to be, and how they are kept in place. I wanted to represent these issues of silence and constraint within the text.

For Grandma W., I represented silence and constraint mostly through the playing cards and wrapping paper that cover pieces of the text. The cards and wrapping paper are objects I associate with my grandmother, as well as things that take up space. These objects and the actions associated with them may take the place of telling stories or sharing troubles. Underneath these coverings in the book, I wrote out the words that need to be hidden. The words are there, just beneath these everyday objects. To expose them would be to expose my family – something I am not able to do. The pencil writing is another way to represent that even the exposed story could easily be erased and forgotten.
In Grandma L.’s book, I wrote in confined spaces. The limitations are imposed by the boundaries, darkened spaces and empty boxes of the crossword puzzle itself. There is also the increasing imposition of random words – answers to the puzzle's printed questions. I described different puzzles in the content of the text, and few answers. The introduction of the musical note at the end of the story also suggests a different language. The text conveys the idea that music may be a way to preserve and remember our family stories. The note suggests that text itself is a limited form of representation. The musical note has no place in a crossword puzzle. It represents a different form of communication and way of knowing – one that, along with the word puzzles, seemed to take precedence for my grandmother in her later years.

The gaps, secrets, and constraints represented in the texts (and by covering the texts) are a way of representing my grandmothers’ lives and my relationship to them and their stories. This form of representation is a physical way of representing the gaps, silences, and constraints in communication and knowledge within families and in society at large. The arts-informed representation, goes beyond the limitations of traditional research representation where a uni-dimensional rendering would reflect my relatively small knowledge of my grandmothers as a deficit in my research, as opposed to an area rich with possibility, complexity, and emotional conflict.

Cole and Knowles (2001) capture the possibilities of alternative ways of representing research – and the potential it holds for audiences. First of all, alternative representation can bring attention to the limitations of representational forms in capturing the fullness of life experience. When people are jarred out of what they are used to seeing, they can perhaps better understand the limits of their usual modes of depicting the world. In addition, representation in alternative forms allows us to “more closely render the aesthetic of lived experience, however partial, and afford readers better opportunities for their own resonant interpretations.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.104)

Both of the books of my grandmothers invite participation from viewers/readers. Viewers become, at the least, witnesses to the story. At the most, they are active readers: touching, deciphering, making meaning out of the research product. Arts-informed representations also allow for complexities to be presented, though not necessarily resolved (Cole & Knowles, 2003). The viewer must engage in the puzzle, come up with the questions, and struggle to find answers.

What I took away from the experience of creating these books and sharing them was the challenge of representing home (and family) in the academy. I still struggle with ethical and personal concerns about bringing close relationships into the often impersonal surroundings of the academy. By collaborating with others committed to these goals, more comfortable environments can be created to share and consider with respect the important questions of home and family relationships.

References
Pulling Together the Threads: Boundaries, Silence and the Continuum of Care Among Women in Families

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My research explores intergenerational silences among women in families who spend most of their lives enmeshed in a world of caring for others. Specifically my research takes a deeper look at the story of care among women in my own family. My research attempts to explode silences that keep intergenerational patterns of care in place. It explores the relationship between caring, concealment, guilt, silence, and protection. Using the representational form of patchwork quilts alongside segments of audio taped dialogue and a picture slide show, my research explores the relationship of care that exists between my mother and grandmother.

My mother has spent over forty years raising and caring for seven children and now at the age of 67, she sustains this continuum of care by taking on the role of full-time caregiver to her 96 year old mother. Whenever I am home to visit my parents, I see how exhausted my mother is at the end of a day caring for my grandma. On more than one occasion, my mother has expressed to me that she feels trapped in a role that inhibits her from doing the things she has been waiting to do all her life. But, because of guilt and obligation, my mother does not tell anyone this except me. After all, a “good daughter” is someone who takes care of her mother and puts her own needs aside without feeling any sense of bitterness or ill fortune (Hilden, 1998).

Very few safe and supportive venues exist for women to vent the frustrations that come with taking on the role of caring for elderly family members. I wanted to “turn up the volume” (McIntyre, 2000, p. 21) on this issue. More importantly, I wanted to create a “safe” medium for women who care to channel their frustrations, and connect with other women in the same circumstance. In the process of talking with both my mother and grandmother, I came to yet another important aspect that I wished to highlight in my research. I came to realize that my grandma, just as my mom, had also taken on the role of full-time caregiver to her mother, and she too was in her late fifties when she took on this role. There is a continuum of care among women in families, and the work that these women do is not recognized or held in very high esteem. I wanted my research to be a tribute to those women in our families and communities who give so unselfishly of themselves to others in their family.

I began thinking about objects and items that represent and symbolize women’s work and women’s hobbies. I also thought a lot about sites and locations that signify “community”, and offer a sense of “support” to women. My mother used to be part of a quilting bee. She told me that the quilting bee was something she would look forward to each week. It was an escape from her everyday work in the home and was a place where she had built strong connections with other women who seemed to share many of the same experiences. This is how I came to choose quilts as the medium for representing my research.

Through listening to my mother, and in doing some background research on quilting, I came to realize that no other art form has been so dominated by women or has “brought so many women together to work, listen and support one another” (Parkin, 1998, p. 2). Quilts and the stories of women stitched into these quilts, reveal a dark corner of women’s history. A quilt with the stories of each caregiver stitched on its squares, would allow the audience to recognize the emotional work of caring among mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters and cousins in their families.
My mother and I made this quilt together. Each square includes a story. There are images of my Great Grandma, my Grandma, my Mother and myself stitched on the squares alongside heartfelt journal entries that both my mother and grandmother offered to share. In making this quilt together, my mother and I talked, cried, shared and cared. This mother-daughter quilting bee allowed my mother the safety she needed to vent her most personal feelings of frustration and worry without having to feel guilty for speaking about them. Each time my mother looks at this quilt, she can feel a deep sense of pride in her wonderful and important work of caring. Hopefully, at the same time, she will think back to what the quilting bee allowed her to do – to let go of the worries and frustrations that go along with the work of caring. In having our own personal quilting bee, I wanted my mother to know just how much I love her, and that just as she is there to care for her mother, so too I am there to care for her now and in the future. The mother-daughter quilting bee will always be there for my mother whenever she needs it.

My research came out of a personal connection with the topic. However, through my quilt, viewers may recognize patterns of care among women in their own families. In the future, perhaps women in our community will join our mother-daughter quilting bee. Creating a space of safety and comfort, these community quilting bees can allow women who do this type of caring work to make links with others in the same circumstance, thus putting in place a circle of care. The end result will be a beautiful tapestry of diverse, heartfelt stories that will work to liberate the women who tell them.

References
Exploring Methodology: Performance for the Self
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The following collage was created at Sara Promislow’s second workshop on the use of collage in the research process (“The Art of Research Collage”, CAIR, April 2004). The collage I created in the first workshop (“Collaging Your Way Through Research”, CAIR, October 2003) was a very conscious process where I took the time to pick images from magazines and then neatly and slowly place them on the page. In this second workshop, I followed Sara’s advice to let the images speak to me. She encouraged us to let the process of creating the collage to be intuitive rather than intellectual. So, I tried. I cut out images I was attracted to without judgment, and then glued them on the page quickly so my mind did not have too much time to get in the way. My favourite experience in making this collage is that the water at the bottom is actually a cut out of mountains turned upside down. As the collage was being formed, I was unaware of the connection between the woman’s foot and the water. When I reflect on it now, I wonder how could I not have known, but it was only when I was finished making the piece that I saw a girl’s foot stepping into an ocean. That image along with the shells and pearls inspired the poetic description, and gave me a deep understanding of exactly what I want to study—the self processes of girls through creative movement.

I created this collage as I was (seemingly) procrastinating, completing my final paper on my research methodology and design for Ardra Cole’s qualitative methodology class (“Perspectives on Qualitative Research: Part II”, OISE/UT, AEC3171S). Not only did this artistic research process help centre me, but it was an integral part of illustrating my methodology for that final paper.

She steps into the ocean of the unknown. There she finds the known that was strategically forgotten by the soul. Encased in beautiful shells, spinning inward. Shells are created to protect. Shells are formed like a cocoon so that the caterpillar can metamorphisize into a butterfly. Shells spin and vortex into the centre until pearls of beauty and wisdom are spun.

When the shell can contain the brilliance of the pearl no longer, it breaks for the whole world to see the power and mystery of what is inside. This is a methodology of seeking pearls hidden within shells of the unconscious as a treasure in the sea waiting to be excavated.

She steps into the ocean to find the treasures of her heart. A methodology of performance not for an audience but for her self, her own consciousness to realize, recognize the person she has become. For her own understanding, she dances her identity in the mirror of her soul. Present, attuned, she locates her place on earth. She sees the brilliant pearl within and becomes the entire ocean.
Ellen Starr (pseudonym), the character depicted in the following poems, was one of four graduate research assistants who participated in my masters’ thesis research (Grundy, 2004). Drawing upon interviews, observations, and textual documents, I discovered what four research assistants learned while engaged in one or more research assistantships, and explored how their experiences shaped their identities as new researchers. Using a variety of written forms and visual narratives, I analyzed and interpreted the participants’ experiences utilizing arts-based literature. Arts-informed narrative analysis revealed multi-dimensional portraits of each research assistant’s learning and identity development. Through text and an accompanying CD-Rom, the thesis includes drawings, poetry, a newsletter, a website, an electronic storyboard, and other representational arts-based forms. [1].

The following diagram is based on hand-drawn pictures that I created as I conducted interviews with Ellen Starr, and analyzed the resulting data. I chose poetry to tell Ellen’s story because it allowed me to translate the visual narrative of the diagram, and to capture the complexities and richness of Ellen’s narrative more effectively. The placement of the poetry text on the page represents integral aspects of Ellen’s journey as a research assistant. As a unit, the poetic narrative tells Ellen’s story over time in carefully chosen words, and the visual diagram reflects the overall story as an interconnected web of shapes, colours, and lines.

Grundy (2004). *A visual representation of Ellen Starr’s learning journey as a Research Assistant*, Electronic image created from drawings, 6”x6
Making New Connections

Ellen
Warm, thoughtful, reflective, and gentle
Thought-provoking friend and colleague to many
Lover of research, writing, and sharing ideas
Who feels lucky, challenged, and fulfilled
Who needs to feel trust in order to share herself
Who fears, not the magnitude, but the fleeting time to complete her work
Who provides feedback and praise to colleagues freely
Who would like to learn, to connect, and to identify with participants
Citizen of the present
Starr

According to Ellen, Research Assistantships are:
A place to learn,
A place to make mistakes,
A place to develop research skills.
They’re the practice side of theoretical learning.

Ellen knew she wanted to be a Research Assistant
When she began her Ph.D. program
And when she inquired, two positions she acquired, and pleased with both, she is.

Ellen didn’t do a research assistantship
When she was completing her master’s degree
And she is sorry she didn’t.

Ellen has revitalized her research language core
While searching through electronic databases
And now familiarity ensues as Ellen conducts literature reviews.

Ellen has learned how to trust
When she shares her writing with her colleagues
And currently she feels a sense of participation, connection, and belonging.

Ellen feels challenged in her research assistantships
Where one requires her to work at things she does well…outwardly
And the other requires her to contemplate herself…inwardly.

As indicated by Ellen, Research Assistantships are:
A place to experience,
A place to make revelations,
A place to develop social skills.
They’re the realistic side of abstract learning.
Imagine.
A cold and dreary December day at Brock University. The wind is blowing. The campus is barren. And there are no students to be found in their seats. Exams are finally over and the holidays have begun. But Ellen still had research work to complete. Ellen’s supervisor arranged for a pass And keys for the library. Ellen had consent, but one challenge loomed. On campus, the heat is turned down to conserve energy. Ellen knows from past experiences that while she is working She gets cold very easily. Therefore, she decided to stay at home and work using proxy. On she worked through the holidays to complete her tasks. Searching through government library databases gathering information She stayed in touch with her supervisor by connecting technologically. Re-negotiation of information ensued. Continuous feedback was given. And time was scheduled from established meeting priorities. Ellen was successful with her RA activities.

Furniture is shifting around above our heads Like thunderous traffic traveling over a road overpass.

As I observe, a research meeting is underway. Ellen is hesitant, but she presses on through the commotion.

Suddenly it is calm, except for barely discernible sounds of rustling Tsk….thunk…tink, tink Like nuts dropping from a tall tree to the ground.

Belonging means to trust. It also means to instill trust in others. Ellen is opening herself up.

Ellen’s voice is soft…subdued. Chronological images emerge fleetingly, but clearly, and then disappear, Like scenery flitting by while looking out of a traveling vehicle.

“layers of armour”
“head and heart disconnected”
“battlefield”
The room’s inhabitants are quiet.
Ellen makes eye contact with me.
I am aware of the silent comprehension.

And the chinking of metal breaking away
Into the abyss.

Moving Towards the Centre

Ellen
Responsible, autonomous, caring, involved, but wary
Chairperson, consultant, and visioning writer to hospitals and community
Lover of innovative projects, new environments, and numerous relationships
Who feels blessed and rewarded, but also conflicted and buried
Who needs movement to grow and diverse experiences to thrive
Who fears the disconnect between her head and her heart
Who offers her free time for volunteer activities, family, and friends
Who would like to put herself first for a change
Resident of the past
Starr

Remembering,
Straight lines, bureaucratic
Slashing, cutting, bleak
Buried heart

Withdrawning
Disconnected

No communication,
Intellectual, technical
Wearing a mask –
Hiding feelings well

Rewarding
Project tasks, independent
Structured, fixed, organized time
Satisfaction from short-term goals

I see blues, pure,
it’s not hostile in colour – blue, very cool, cold and then it’s not,
and then more
structure.
The task might be mundane –
Routine
But there is something good that comes out of it.
After a while you get tired of thinking about the same thing
And you’d be surprised how you come up with something
And you say - “Hang on a second, how do I change that?”

Changing
“Start with yourself first”
   It has sort of moved,
   and there’s another piece.

I’ve had to push myself….
I can’t say that it’s been terrible,
But in fact it’s been quite positive
It’s forced me to do other things that I might not have done.

I’m still working on it.
The colours are very different - it’s more circular.

Hoping
   Moving…
   Pockets of life…murmurs

“I think that’s what’s sort of beginning to happen with this,
it’s moving closer,
   and allowing me
   to connect within me,
   the heart side,
   that I learned
   to cover up
   during
   really difficult times”

Stretching, awakening…
   “Layers of armour”
   A revival.

The colours. I can visualize the colours coming through it.
Glinting through the cracks.
life, growing, thriving, nurtured…
I see more yellows and oranges and a bit of red in there and more circular.
I see it as a fine line
seamlessness
you don’t realize it.
you get exposure
you don’t realize that this is part of the job as well
move back and forth I’ve found
just take a step back
what does this mean?
take the time to explain

You talk about inclusion.
We’re no longer included any more –
We are.
We are piecing our ideas together –
We are a community.

I think this project
When I went into it
When I felt others learned like that
I loved it even more

I think maybe in my background
That is actually a painful time for me
What I produced had to reflect me
And reaching inside I found my work was more successful because of this aspect
A lot of others, they were disconnected

A lot of self-portraits were shallow,
Very external and my work was very abstract.
It was very personal.
I had to take a deep breath; I had to really say,
“OK”
“I’m just going to have to let it out”
“Talk about it”
“Sort of put myself out there”
And this project,
when I learned that I liked that
Oh wow

Keep doing that,
It makes me feel better.
It makes me feel, more like me….
alive!

**Connecting Head and Heart**

Ellen
Confident, knowledgeable, open, and enthusiastic
An honoured member of a small research community
Lover of learning, narrative methodology, and meaningful experiences
Who feels content and a sense of belonging
Who needs to tell her story in order to identify with herself and others
Who welcomes the re-joining of her heart and her head
Who gives ideas, support, and consideration
Who would like to hold a university faculty position
Pioneer of the future
Starr

Past work is lateral work,
Project and research focused.
Future work builds on the present.
Organizationally, it has prepared Ellen in learning about research.

Project and research focused,
Ellen is creating her own library using EndNote: Her own database of learning.
Organizationally, it has prepared Ellen in learning about research.
Ellen is learning about narrative textual analysis.

Ellen is creating her own library using EndNote: Her own database of learning. “Narrative is a very attractive methodology, I need to learn more about it.”
Ellen is learning about narrative textual analysis.
She feels connected to her research and she anticipates the connections with others.

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The learning stems from the research team approach.
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Each person is an equal and a valuable member: a team of researchers.

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“I think I’ll use everything. It’s part of my training, part of the development process.”

“Being a part of this research experience is valuable just in processing living…”
“It actually is that sort of practice side, if you will, to some of the theories you learn…”
“I think I’ll use everything. It’s part of my training, part of the development process.”
“It’s such an important place to be able to see how some of the theories play out.”

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The techniques and practices that Ellen is developing will be used along the way.
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“I’ll use all of the skills that I am learning right now and will continue to learn…”

The techniques and practices that Ellen is developing will be used along the way.
Future work builds on the present.
“I’ll use all of the skills that I am learning right now and will continue to learn…”
Past work is lateral work.

Ellen Starr
Insightful, Pleasant
Discussing, Conveying, Musing
Educator, Interviewee-
“I didn’t really think about it until now.
I hadn’t thought of it until you asked the question.
I feel myself in a different place now in the curve

…it’s like a dialogue…

“It really helped me
To experience, to feel, to remember
What some of this literature is talking about.
Moving from the periphery into the centre,
In this team,
That’s very seamlessly done.

“What really is happening here?
This is something that’s far subtler.

“After our last interview,
I went home
And I did a lot of thinking.
About one of the things that a colleague said to me
When I first met with him about joining the team,
He said, ‘This is the highlight of my work here.’

arts-informed 29
I was really intrigued by that.

“There are some fundamental things underneath the surface that are played
And something is happening.
I think so much of what I do with this team
Has probably been the most extraordinary experience for me.

“And then
When I was thinking
After our first interview,
I’d say,
‘You know, this is one of the highlights for me too’

…your thoughts just triggered…

“I wouldn’t have made that observation myself.
I’m not sure I would’ve necessarily thought about it that way.
Some of these interviews actually have helped me to think more deeply.”

-Interviewer, Learner

Listening, Responding, Understanding
Subdued, Attentive
Annabelle Grundy

References

Endnote
1. If you are interested in learning more about this research, please visit the following website to view the complete thesis study: [www.ed.brocku.ca/multiplestories/AG-thesis.html](http://www.ed.brocku.ca/multiplestories/AG-thesis.html)
CAIR Notes

On April 26, 2004, the launch of Provoked by Art: Theorizing arts-informed research, the second volume in the Arts-informed Inquiry Series, was celebrated at OISE/UT. Fabulous food, beverages and readings by local authors (Deborah Barndt, Leah Burns, Ardra Cole, Rishma Dunlop, Ross Gray, Tracy Luciani, Sharon Sbrocchi, Suzanne Thomas, and Kelly Young) were shared at this event. The excitement of Provoked by Art was carried over to the Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences in Winnipeg. On May 29, Nancy Davis Halifax, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Wanda Hurren; Karen Schaller, Liz de Freitas, Kelly Young; Roewan Crowe, Tracy Luciani; Allan Neilsen and Stephanie Springgay created and facilitated four arts-informed workshops on poetic prose, mixed-genre writing, fiction and visual art. Later that evening, Provoked by Art contributors at the conference read from their chapters at the McNally Robinson Bookstore launch. Thank you to all who participated in these events!

Tracy Luciani

Member Update

Suzanne Thomas, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Fellow in the Centre for Arts-informed Research, taught courses at Memorial University's Spring Intersession and at Mount St. Vincent's Summer Institute in arts-informed research perspectives. Forthcoming is: Of earth and flesh and bones and breath: Landscapes of embodiment and moments of re-enactment, Backalong Books & The Centre for Arts-informed Research.

Christine van Halen-Faber, Ph.D., has been awarded the 2004 Canadian Association for Teacher Education dissertation award at the Annual General Meeting in Winnipeg, MB, on May 29, 2004 for her arts-based doctoral dissertation Seeing through apples: An exploration into the ethics and aesthetics of a teacher-educator-researcher's arts-based beginnings.

CAIR Events 2004-5

The Centre for Arts-informed Research Seminar Series:

In a series of informal lunch hour presentations, ‘scholartists’ share completed works of ‘scholartistry’, providing a glimpse of the triumphs and tribulations of engaging in research without precedents, and inspiration to novice and experienced ‘scholartistis’ alike. Seminar Room 7-162, 12:00-1:30pm

Seminars will be announced shortly for the following dates:

November 11, 2004; December 9, 2004; January 27, 2005; February 24, 2005; March 24, 2005

The Centre for Arts-informed Research Works-in-progress Series

In a series of informal afternoons artful inquirers share the process and progress of research, providing a forum for informal, supportive, and informative exchanges to sustain inquirers at various stages of the arts-informed research process. 7th floor South Panoramic Lounge, 4:00-5:30 pm

September 29, 2004 Eimear O’Neill Holding Flames: Women’s illuminations on s/Self transformation

Building on the community arts installation currently displayed in the Peace Lounge on the 7th. Floor, this presentation puts forward some of the transformations in understanding about processes of s/Self transformation emerging from this doctoral research and the projects it has sparked. Those attending are encouraged to reflect on their own transforming selves in artful ways.
Lynette Plett Hand-pieced Knowledge

Lynette explores ways to use quilts and quilting as sources, research process, methodology, and data presentation for her academic inquiry. She combines autobiographical readings with displays of some of her own quilted projects and images of quilts made by her mother and grandmother.

November 24, 2004 To be announced
January 12, 2005 To be announced
February 9, 2005 Indrani Margolin
March 9, 2005 To be announced
April 6, 2005 Monica Prendergast

If you are interested in presenting in either the Seminar or Works-in-progress series, please contact Dorothy Lichtblau at: dlichtblau@oise.utoronto.ca

Things to watch for 2005:
The third volume of the Arts-informed Inquiry Series The Art of Visual Inquiry and the following volume Creating Scholartistry: Imagining the Arts-informed Thesis or Dissertation will be launched in 2005. Watch out for details!

**Arts-Informed Doctoral Theses at OISE/UT**


**Coming Soon:**

Gosse, Douglas *Breaking silences, an inquiry into identity and the creative research process.*

Sharon Sbrecchi *Remembering place: Domicide and a childhood home*

**Arts-Informed Doctoral Theses at other Canadian Universities**

Donawa, Margaret Wendy (UVIC, 2000). *A rebel band of friends: Understanding through women’s narratives of friendship, identity, and moral agency.*

Kirkland, Kevin (UBC, 2004). *A Grim fairy tale.*


Schaller, Karen (MSVU, 2002). *A writing story, on being written: A thetic play on words.*
Journals of Interest

The Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy (JCP) is a new journal under the editorialship of Patrick Slattery (Texas A & M) and James Henderson (Kent State). The Journal aims to advance scholarship that explores the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy. For more details see the website at: http://www.coe.tamu.edu/candp

The journal will feature a black and white image on the cover of each journal. Images must be portrait orientation (height larger than width), black and white, high resolution (300 dpi) and accompanied by a 250 word abstract. Submissions should be sent to Stephanie Springgay (Assistant Editor) sspringgay@bigfoot.com. Please include in the subject line of the email: JCP image submission. The journal will also occasionally consider publishing manuscript length descriptions of the arts-based educational research submission for the cover.

Books of Interest

Arts Informed Inquiry Series

Backalong Books and The Centre for Arts-informed Research

The Art of Writing Inquiry
Lorri Neilsen, Ardra L. Cole, & J. Gary Knowles (Eds.)
ISBN 1-894132-06-8. List Price CDN $34.95

A rich collection of arts-informed writing as inquiry and inquiry into writing: essays on teaching and learning, excerpts and examples of writing inquiry, exhortations, strategies for writing and inquiring, powerful poetry and plays to perform-all at the leading edge of contemporary scholartistry.

Provoked by Art: Theorizing Arts-informed Inquiry
Edited by Ardra L. Cole, Lorri Neilsen, J. Gary Knowles, & Teresa Luciani

In this collection authors draw on illustrative examples of arts-informed research to foreground theoretical elements and issues associated with new genres of social science inquiry. Through languages and genres of fiction, poetry, drama, and visual arts the works in this volume show the potential of arts-informed research to bring together the academy and diverse knowledge communities.

Upcoming 2005

The Art of Visual Inquiry, Edited by J. Gary Knowles, Ardra L. Cole, Lorri Neilsen, & Teresa Luciani
List price: CDN$28.95

Creating Scholartistry: Imagining the Arts-informed Thesis or Dissertation
Edited by J. Gary Knowles, Ardra L. Cole, Lorri Neilsen and Sara Promislow
Scholartist Series
A new series from Backalong Books and the Centre for Arts-informed Research

Upcoming 2004
Of earth and flesh and bones and breath:
Landscapes of embodiment and moments
of re-enactment
by Suzanne M. Thomas
ISBN 1-894132-14-9
List price CDN$34.95

To order books send a cheque or money order to:
Backalong Books
Box 33066 RPO
Quinpool Centre
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3L 4T6
Fax: (902) 228-2276
www.backalongbooks.com

Books are also available for purchase at The Centre for Arts-informed Research events
and can be ordered through the Centre’s website:
http://home.oiye.utoronto.ca/~aresearch
The Center for Arts-informed Research is inviting contributions for its online publication arts-informed. This publication is a space for ‘scholarartists’, who are exploring and articulating ways of bringing together art and social science research, to write about their experiences; share their creative work; and participate in an ongoing dialogue among researchers who are committed to expanding the boundaries of academic discourse. We welcome submissions of ‘scholartistry’, essays, reflections, poetry, short stories, book reviews, artwork, etc. Descriptions if works in progress are encouraged.

Length and Format: Contributions should not exceed 2,000 words. The format for citations and reference should conform to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (Latest Edition). References should be listed at the end of the contribution, not in the form of (end)notes. To facilitate online publishing, endnotes are used instead of footnotes. All submissions should be saved in Rich Text Format (RTF), and sent as an attachment.

Images: Images should be saved in JPG format and sent as an attachment. Only copies or photos of original images or art should be sent to us. Copyright laws must be respected. Be sure to include identifying information on each item submitted (name of artist, year, title, art-form and/or materials and original dimensions). Please note the preferred location of images in your contribution. We reserve the right to select which, if any, graphics are included in the article.

In addition we continue to update our regular columns:

Member updates: If you have news to share please send your updates (limited to 60 words).

Arts-informed doctoral theses at OISE library and other institutes: Please send your thesis title and the year it was completed, with (an optional) brief description of your work (limited to 60 words).

Books/Journals/Articles of interest: If you would like to recommend a book, journal or article related to arts-informed inquiry, please send the reference (APA style), with a short description (limited to 60 words).

Please direct all submissions to Sara Promislow, arts-informed editor at: spromislow@oise.utoronto.ca Please indicate “arts-informed” as subject.

Deadline for Submissions: Vol. 4(2) March 15, 2004

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