Education and/as Art: A Found Poetry Suite

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Abstract

Embracing metaphor as method (Prendergast, 2005; see also Prendergast, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a), which I suggest is a key characteristic of thinking poetically and doing poetic inquiry, is the process conveyed in this suite of found poems. The investigation began with a cross-disciplinary scholarly database search on the term “education as art” that asked: How has education been conceived as artful over time? This search led to (sadly but unsurprisingly) very few sources that explicitly employ this metaphor. However, what was discovered was powerful enough to warrant interpretation through poetic transcription and representation in a suite of found poems. These poems reveal the frustration, even rage, of those who wish to re-vision education as artful. They also reveal hopeful (perhaps utopian) views of what education could look like if re-conceived as the enculturation of artists. These found poems were presented as part of a keynote lecture to Ph.D. education students at the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal in April of 2011.
imagination

we live in lands
of what might be
and
what might have been

worlds
far greater
of more import
than the world
of what is

imagination
turns lust
into love
the need for shelter
into construction
and industry
converts food-taking
into dining
(but turns some
into gluttons)

by virtue
of imagination
human life oscillates
a vague median line
(what we might call
natural animality)
it soars above
    in ideals, science,
        art, religion

it drops below
    in crimes, cruelties,
        injustices, perversions

the work of actuality
is imagination’s legacy

it is only
with imagination
we get away
from everything
but the bloom of the rose
early in the morning

it takes imagination
to think of
    being free

(Broudy, 1972/1994, pp. 12-14)
Art as education/Education as art

during one very unfortunate moment in history
Philistines in positions of power decided to isolate art

art from education

art (metadiscipline of knowledge) was degraded to today’s definition: discipline and craft focused on the production of objects (few manufacturers/many buyers)

a dispensable entertainment rather than a way of thinking

redesign this structure: underline the relationship
between artist and public

incorporate the visitor

into the creative process

equip the consumer

to become the creator

reclaim art

as a methodology

for knowledge

stimulating

the intelligence

a profound revision

of the social function

of art

(Camnitzer, 2009, p. 230)
art and education

are not different things;
they are different
specifications
of a common activity

(Camnitzer, 2009, p. 234)
the fact is:
we have to
introduce art
into education
as a pedagogical method
as a methodology
to acquire knowledge
the fact is:
we have to
hone the rigor
in creation
and
improve communication
with the public
the fact is:
there is no
real education
without art
no true art
without education
the fact is:
the artist
who cannot survive
in the market
goes to teach
without knowing how

the fact is:
the teacher
who runs out of
ideas
doesn’t dare
to go to art
to get them

the fact
(the tragic fact)
is:
we socially accept
one can teach
without rigor
one makes art
by divine appointment

(Camnitzer, 2009, p. 235)
transparency

transparency
is a fundamental
ingredient
in true pedagogy

we have to become
educator-artists

we have to become
artist-educators

another country:
doing away
   with borderlines
pushing
   in the same direction

(Camnitzer, 2009, pp. 236, 237)
education as art and discipline

education so conceived
(very far from
being a performance
of learner
as
passive spectator)

the subject
detains, fixes thought,
feeds interest,
giving color
to excitement

resembles
very closely
the attitude
of artist
to material
(the complex relation
of submission
and mastery)

the discipline
of art
emerges

(Black, 1944, p. 292)
there is no more
a likelihood
of finding
a recipe
for education
than finding
an infallible method
for making
painters
or
poets

(Black, 1944, p. 294)
education as art

human experience is layered

mechanical behaviors/beliefs require no investment/intelligence

(our hearts beat we learn to walk we believe the sun will rise tomorrow)

the mechanics of our world breathing and pumping blood

we must learn to perform to adopt

we call this training

intelligent behaviours call for drawing a conclusion
forming an intention
achieving understanding
conceiving a new creation

we must learn
the alphabet
    before we read
to spell
    before poetry
to add
and subtract
    before proving
to hold
a pencil
    before we draw
to play scales
    before Mozart

what is most
worth learning?

a conception
of the good
    constituted
    at the level
    of community

(Alexander, 2003, p. 9)
teaching

teaching
not only
transmits
old ideas,
it creates
  new ones

not only
predetermined
feelings
and norms
[but] also
  new attitudes
  and practices

teaching
is generative
not (merely)
reproductive

recalls the past
but also
pushes the limits
  criticizes
  explores
  examines
education
as
creative
or
artistic
activity
to transmit
and
transform
to initiate
visions of
the good:
that which
we cherish
most
at the boundaries
of culture
(expanding
and testing)
nurturing
good people

(Alexander, 2003, pp. 9-10)
artful teachers

of all subjects
(like sculptors
and painters)
study and find
creative ways
to expand
their discipline

artful teachers
attend
to their audience
(like dancers
on a stage)
most fruitfully
to be engaged

artful teachers
aware of
the classroom
space (like actors
in a theater)
in which they
move
the roles and faces
they represent

artful teachers
choose language
(like writers, like
a blank page)
care-fully

artful teachers
abandon intended
melody (like
jazz musicians)
to explore an
unexpected theme

artful teachers
break the boundaries
(like art)
and

    set us free

(Davis, 2005, p. 193)
References


About the Author
Dr. Monica Prendergast is Assistant Professor of Drama/Theatre Education at the University of Victoria. Her research interests include; arts-based and practice-based research, critical pedagogies, performance theories and poetic inquiry. She is co-editor of *Poetic Inquiry* (Sense, 2009) and *Applied Theatre* (Intellect, 2009). She has also co-edited two themed journal issues on poetic inquiry methods (*Educational Insights* [2009] and *Creative Approaches to Research* [2012]), and is currently co-editor of the *Canadian Journal of Practice-Based Research in Theatre*. Forthcoming books include a monograph on utopian thinking in drama/theatre education, a co-authored handbook on applied drama facilitation and a co-edited poetic inquiry collection.
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