



People in the Landscape by M. Hiske

## 2. Writing the Self in Global Citizenship Education

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### Introduction

Higher education is tasked with preparing students for a culturally diverse and globalizing world. Additionally, western nations have an increasingly diverse student population and know the success of their students will depend in part on being able to navigate diversity. There is therefore good reason for institutions of higher learning to promote and facilitate the development of 'global citizens' – people who can work and relate across borders and boundaries, both real and perceived. However, teachers are not necessarily equipped to foster this learning. Many teachers are used to a reproductive way of teaching while the learning that is needed here is identity learning, directed at dialogue, internally as well as externally. This chapter proposes the potential of creative, expressive and reflective writing as a way in which personal development – a form of a reflexive internal dialogue – can be fostered to promote cultural healing and global citizenship. The writing method will be described and a case study on cultural healing in the context of Canada's reconciliation efforts with Aboriginal people will be used to illustrate the learning process involved.

Higher education faces the challenge of helping students to survive and thrive in a globalizing and culturally diverse world (Banks, 2015). We can no longer speak only of 'national identities', but must think in terms of multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka, 2011). But this task is complicated by issues (of fear) of identity loss that can be seen in the rise of radical nationalism, the fear and pressures surrounding refugees and migration, and ongoing economic difficulties that trigger existing cultural tensions (Cogan & Derricott, 2014).

The need for cultural competence has been established. This involves as an ability to navigate borders and boundaries, both real and perceived, and results in people being able to work with and relate to one another regardless of their cultural background (Archambault, 2015; Lowenstein, 2009). Higher education recognizes it should play a greater role in this learning process (Lewin, 2010), yet teachers frequently feel ill-equipped or lack the confidence to provide it or to broach the difficult issues that it bring up (Davies, 2006). This in part stems from the fact that education has traditionally been focused on reproductive learning (Meijers, 2013) and has therefore conceptualized global education with things like 'learning about other cultures' or 'engaging in community service' (Davies, 2006). Cultural competence, however, requires a more

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in-depth approach to learning where identities are examined and restored (Lengelle, Jardine, & Bonnar, 2018) and is not merely a knowledge-based type of education. That said research shows that teachers responsible for citizenship education still emphasize helpful activities and knowledge of other cultures predominantly (Davies, 2006). They “tend to rationalize the unfamiliar concept of global citizenship through more familiar concepts and discourses” and this is why “...educators need more rigorous assistance to teach emerging types of citizenship” (Rapport, 2010, p. 179) where real cultural competence can be learned.

By extension, this chapter argues that higher education must begin to develop and offer learning opportunities for teachers and students that address the underlying issues of human fear, such as a fear of identity loss and rigid and unexamined self-concepts (Greenwald, 1980). In order to do this, people must be facilitated in identity-learning processes that facilitate an ‘*Umwendung*’ where self-examination and self-care also becomes a point of focus and the starting point of seeing the ‘other’ (Schellhammer, 2018). Such an identity learning process involves both an internal as well as an external dialogue (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012) and in this chapter, the emphasis will be on the internal dialogue – an aspect of identity learning that is underemphasized in our predominantly monological educational settings (Meijers, 2013).

Identity is defined here as “a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). This story (i.e. identity) is also multi-voiced (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) – indeed it is a so-called multiple identity with “a number of cultural facets...and more, importantly, loyalties.” (Davies, 2006, p. 10). By unearthing those facets and loyalties, it becomes increasingly clear which voices might stimulate or what might inhibit key aims of global citizenship education (e.g. social justice, valuing diversity, having confidence to respond to change) (WMCGC, 2002, p. 56). For instance, if one identifies and gives voice to whom one feels loyal to (e.g. people from one’s own ethnic background) and what one believes culturally (e.g. ‘white people are more organized and capable’), it becomes possible to question this loyalty or to also explore ideas of ‘them’ and ‘us’ more honestly. If such loyalties remain hidden or unconscious, they act as default narratives, with the accompanying default responses. This is not to conflate global citizenship with personal development as some researchers have warned (Davies, 2006, p. 16) but rather to acknowledge the importance of reflexivity regarding the self, as a starting point for change. Students and teachers alike must have ways to examine their stories and beliefs (e.g. who am I within this multicultural setting; what and who do I fear; what keeps me passive; which issues personally move me or call to me). Indeed, cultural learning and healing must be experienced in the self, and teachers who understand this and have methods to work with lived experience can facilitate identity development (Lengelle, Jardine & Bonnar, 2017).

Recent research explored the theory and practice of identity change and the possibility of cultural healing through the 'writing the self' method (Lengelle, Jardine & Bonnar, 2017). This method makes cultivating an internal dialogue and creating new stories of identity possible (Lengelle, Meijers, & Hughes, 2016). It involves writing creatively, expressively and reflectively about actual experiences and beliefs in order to construct new stories of meaning and direction. It is a meaning-oriented identity learning method as opposed to a reproductive learning approach and it is proposed here that it has applications for promoting global citizenship, which will be illustrated with a case study.

### **The Method**

*Writing the self* is a practice of writing our stories to shift our identities from stuck, fearful, and outmoded 'first stories' to life-giving and meaningful 'second stories' (for a full overview, see Lengelle, 2014). As mentioned above, it allows us to explore and co-construct new meanings through creative, expressive and reflective writing and is a theoretically founded and evidence-based method (Lengelle & Meijers, 2015; Lengelle, Meijers & Hughes, 2016). Students and teachers may use it to explore what they value, what pains them, what drives them, and in this way promote cultural healing through personal awareness (Lengelle, Jardine & Bonnar, 2018). They do this through a number of structured exercises, usually in a group setting or sometimes individually, and are facilitated by a writing facilitator. Three types of writing can be distinguished.

*Creative writing* refers primarily to fiction-based writing that reveal life themes indirectly (e.g. exploring a deplorable trait by turning it into a fictional character and exploring its hidden messages and advantages). *Expressive writing* refers to exploring both the facts and emotions surrounding painful life events in order to create meaningful and health-promoting narratives (Pennebaker, 2011). This type of writing often uncovers unconscious drivers and intrinsic motivation as exploring pain holds keys to our limitations and resistance (e.g. "Writing from the point of view of my 'white identity' I realized I am filled with stereotypes. I am determined now to be more aware of how I act those out.") *Reflective writing* refers to the ability to write reflexively about life events, shaping meaning more cognitively and cultivating the observer position in the process. In order to illustrate how writing the self promotes the internal dialogue underlying cultural healing, I provide a reflection on a recent writing project I undertook with two graduate students at Athabasca University, Canada's Open University. They both participated in a course called *Writing the Self* (Lengelle, 2003) that promotes personal healing and provides theory, research and experiential learning in this area. The personal healing here (i.e. happening on the micro level) affects the macro level (i.e. society) by making individuals conscious of their prejudices, fears, and identity stories: they come to understand how what they believe 'personally' has repercussions for their interactions with others, in their direct environment but also on society.

## Illustrative case study

Canada, although known in the world as a democratic and peace-keeping nation, has a dark colonial past where the people native to Canada (referred to as Aboriginal or First Nations) were systematically controlled, abused, robbed of their land and cultural heritage, and even murdered in attempts to make way for colonialist governments and new settlers from Europe and elsewhere (Monchalin, 2016). Much overdue but well-intentioned attempts at reconciliation are underway and the need for change is underscored by for instance the high suicide rates and substance abuse rates among this population. The federal government in a report by the 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' has outlined 94 recommendations both on national and individual fronts that call for honest efforts to promote cultural healing. This background sets the stage for the following *Writing the Self* stories that pertain to cultural healing on the individual level and illustrate the potential of this learning in a wider context.

Charity Jardine, a First Nations woman and school teacher, was exploring her internalized pain and the stereotypical ideas about being an Aboriginal person. She writes:

In my reality I was inferior because of my Native background. To belong to that race meant you were poor, ugly, drunk, fat, unhealthy, abused, addicted, and likely a failure. I was convinced that the only measures to success and happiness were to get married to someone non-Native, get a higher education, and buy lots of things.

In 2016 she first engaged in *Writing the Self* course (Lengelle, 2003) and tells about how she went from barely being able to swallow to realizing she has been trying to make herself 'swallow' a harmful and culturally prejudiced narrative about herself. In the process of writing narratives of self, engaging in proprioceptive journal writing (Trichter-Metcalf & Simon, 2002) and undoing the beliefs she uncovered through inquiry-based writing (Katie, 2002) Charity began to undo the stories that had become an unquestioned history, which had imprisoned her. She became aware that there are stories about the self that can indeed "...wound us and break us, separate and alienate us, pacify us, and expose us to losses so severe that we can easily cease to be." (Anderson, Holt, & McGady, 2000, p. 61).

Charlene Bonnar, a white woman and college advisor working with Aboriginal students was concerned about their high dropout rate and began to explore what she might contribute to the wellbeing of her First Nations students. However, instead of doing this in instrumental ways based on good intentions and information, she began her own narrative exploration of how she herself had been raised with prejudice. The answer to the question, 'how can I be of real service' required a deeper question, "how did what

I was taught become internalized and how might it now limit my ability to be useful to my students?" In other words, Charlene too cultivated an internal dialogue, which was additionally enriched and enriching through an external dialogue with an Aboriginal knowledge keeper. She learned she had grown up with many stereotypical ideas about Aboriginal people and that the process of changing required both a deeper listening and allowing vulnerability to become part of her conversations.

In writing a book chapter together, Charity, Charlene and I (Lengelle, Jardine, & Bonnar, 2018) concluded that stories of self not reconciled within the self cannot lead to reconciliation – the work of cultural healing must begin in our own hearts. In more academic language this means that the quality of the internal dialogue contributes directly to the quality of the external dialogue and that an internal dialogue is essential in preparing people for a truly globalized world, where people can work and relate across borders and boundaries, both real and perceived.

## **Discussion**

As educators we know that the adage 'physician heal thyself' applies to us too but we are not always clear on how we might do the work with ourselves and students. In part this is because the emotional labour involved in creating an internal dialogue within an educational system that has been inherited from the industrial age – with its corresponding notions of teacher identity as brokers and bearers of 'information and skills' – is uncomfortable and complicated. In research on conversations between students and teachers, we see that teachers still do most of the talking and focus on school progress and are not as focused on exploring topics that are meaningful to students (Winters, Meijers, Kuijpers, & Baert, 2009). In addition, innovation efforts in education are often well-meaning attempts at change that are either not supported well enough by theory and research or are undermined by lack of support by the various levels of leadership that would make real change possible on a structural level. In order to facilitate and make room for fostering more 'internal dialogues' in our classrooms, the narrative about teachers' professional identity and the identity of educational institutions must also change. This too requires an internal dialogue where questions of fear and identity are explored.

## Conclusion

The processes of writing the self and re-narrating identity has several promising benefits for both students and teachers in higher education. First it allows us to learn more about ourselves and what blocks our learning (i.e. promotes self-reflection). Second, it allows us to change our story and our identifications and therefore choose differently (i.e. self-direction). Third, it is a companion on the road of life where we literally learn to talk and listen to ourselves and articulate the tacit knowledge that can be unearthed through narrative, journal, and poetic writing. Fourth, the method is playful and creative and although tears are frequently shed in the process, students report a great enjoyment in writing and sharing their stories with others. It is a meaningful dialogue about experience and also has the potential of promoting cultural (Lengelle, Jardine, & Bonnar, 2018) healing in the context of a very diverse student body (Banks, 2015). It also has the potential for creating new bonds in the classroom and allows teachers in higher education to engage in the difficult work of facilitating global citizenship learning. The internal dialogue described here also allows us to 'clean up' judgements and become aware of the need to reach out to others. Not only the actual sharing of vulnerable writing in a class or online setting shows us we are not alone, but 'writing the self' focuses deliberately on where we have become fearful about our own and others' identities and allows us a learning process to unearth those things, heal them in order to reach out to others.

## Words of thanks

I appreciate the work Charlene Bonnar and Charity Jardine did with me in our chapter *Writing the self for reconciliation and global citizenship: The inner dialogue and creative voices for cultural healing* (see reference list) and that they gave me their permission to share their stories here in an abbreviated form once more.

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